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Shaping This Space Between Us: using a reflexive journaling process to explore the complex and malleable space in which identity exists

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Shaping This Space Between Us

using a reflexive journaling process to explore the
complex and malleable space in which identity exists

Approval certificate for Lina MaHusain, for the thesis project entitled Shaping This Space Between Us: using a reflexive journaling process to explore the complex and malleable space in which identity exists. Submitted to the faculty of the Master of Fine Arts in Design of Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, in partial fulfillment for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Design.

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acknowledgment It is impossible to express appreciation to each and every person who played a role in helping me complete my graduate thesis project, but I would like to take a moment here to single out those who had the greatest impact on my journey.

I would like to thank my parents, the two people who caused all that is my life, and without whose love and support I would never have made it this far.

Words cannot express the gratitude that I feel towards my committee for their continued support and guidance: Peter Martin, my main adviser; Alexander Cheek and Michael Hersrud, my secondary advisers; and Richard Lombard, my reader. I'd like to specifically thank Peter for teaching me how to be a designer, and for pushing me to lean into my own discomfort long enough to reach the other side of this project. I'd like to thank Alexander for teaching me how to properly design theoretical structures to support my arguments, and for constantly sharing invaluable literature with me that specifically led to many breakthroughs in my work. I'd like to thank Michael for understanding my personal voice and style, and for helping me communicate authentically through design. Last, but not least, I'd like to thank Richard for the many hours of meaningful conversation he engaged in with me in order to bring forth the true nature of my inquiry, and for painstakingly reading through draft after draft of my writing without once hinting at discomfort.

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abstract While some parts of identity remain constant throughout one's life, many aspects of a person's identity are subject to rapid and constant change and negotiation. Using theories regarding the role possessions play in the construction, reinforcement, and manifestation of a person's identity, this thesis project explores the potential to facilitate meaningful insights and awareness into one's own identity. This will be achieved by designing a reflexive journaling process. A qualitative evaluation of this prototype journal process used by a pilot group of young creative individuals will generate an assessment of the proposed process.

| photograph | Amsterdam
March 9th, 2012

introduction During my second semester in the MFA program at VCUQ, I went on a field study trip with my MFA peers to Amsterdam. Our trip was set up to participate in the Extranational Workshop conducted by the Dirty Art Department of the Sandberg Institute. Though the work that came out of the workshop can be considered relevant to my overall thesis work, it is the events that happened outside of the workshop on the last day of our trip that had a far greater impact on my thesis direction.

On the last evening of the trip, I found myself having dinner with three other grad students from my program and the sister of one of the students; we were three Qatari females, one Kuwaiti/American female, and one Egyptian male. Towards the end of the meal, one of the girls suggested we play Truth or Dare to pass the time. Having no interest in acting out any silly dares, I suggested we just play Truth or Truth. I wasn't surprised to find that everyone else felt the same, and so we began to play.

For an hour and a half, in a tiny Italian restaurant in the heart of Amsterdam five Arabs openly shared stories about their lives that they would/could never have shared in Doha. As the evening drew to an end I felt compelled to keep the knife that we had used to play the game not only because it was a participant in our game, but also a witness to our choice to step away from our identities for one evening. After asking permission from the manager, I slipped the knife into my purse and left the restaurant knowing we would never be the people we were in that restaurant again.

This trip was a turning point in my time at VCUQ. Before the trip we had all been friendly with each other, but not really friends; and after that evening we became much closer. Before the trip I would have described us as individuals who happened to all be in the MFA program at VCUQ, but after the trip we were individuals who made up an interconnected group of grad students at VCUQ.

At the time, I couldn't explain why I felt a great sense belonging after the trip to Amsterdam, or why I had to keep the knife, but when I look back on that

moment now, I understand. Through scholarly work that I discovered during my literature review, I have come to understand both the process by which a group of Arab students came to know each other on a trip to Amsterdam, and I am also able to see now what meanings became imbedded in the knife over the course of that evening.

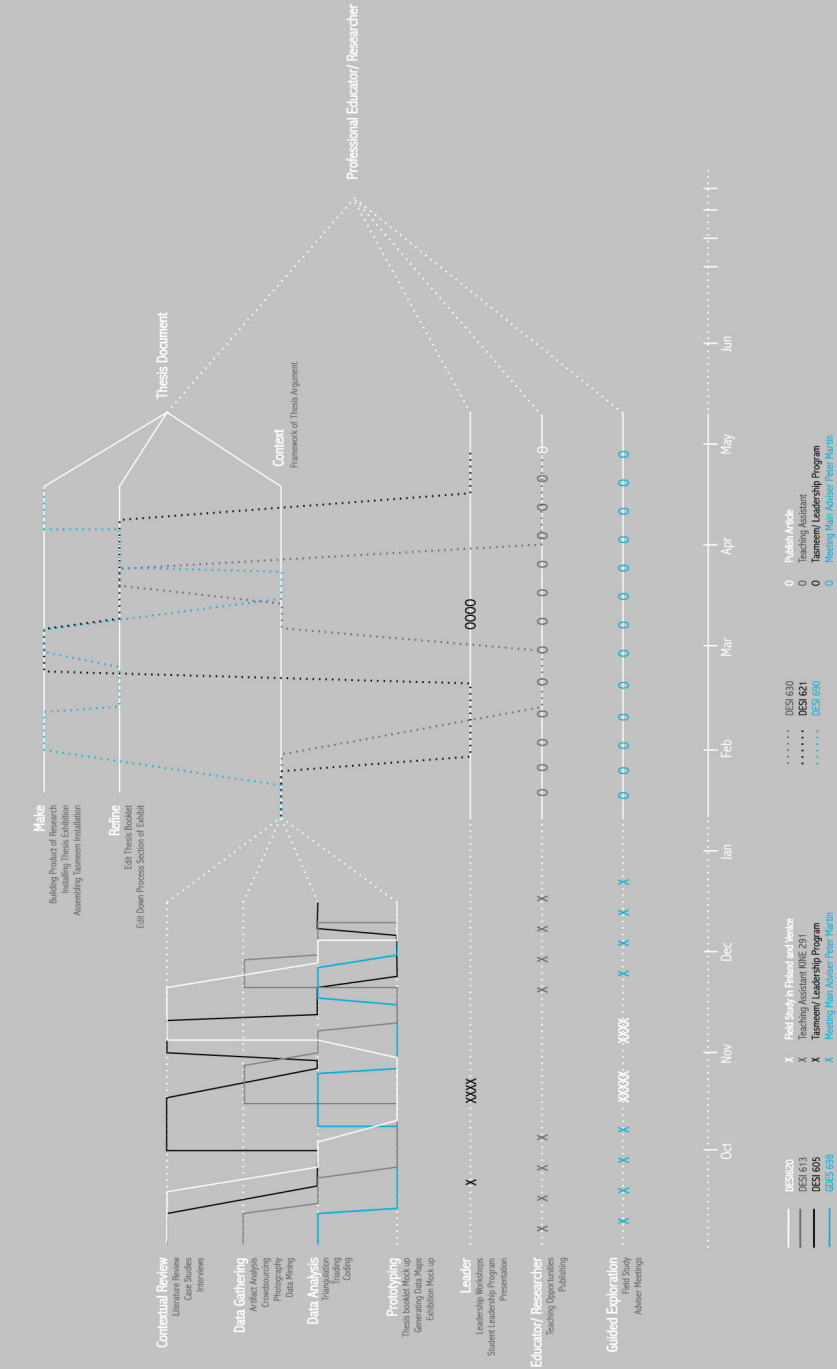
It seems that at some point on our way to Amsterdam our culturally imposed identity labels were shifted. At some point we were no longer a group of Arabs in a sea of Arabs, we had all become strangers in a strange land together. When our identities were no longer restricted by the norms of our society we were able to look inside and decide for ourselves who we truly wanted to be. Somehow in making those individual choices we ended up in a small group of grad students who felt that sharing a moment of vulnerability in a little Italian restaurant was good for them. By disclosing some of our most meaningful possessions (our secrets), our most intimate "truths", we allowed ourselves to be seen for the first time, and allowed ourselves to be known.

The knife that I kept became an artifact through which I will forever document that chapter of my life, that choice, and that moment when we all took a stand on our affirmed identities and chose to belong to a group that we had created. It is also a symbol of social connection, a type of connection that is not often shared in the Arab world with people who are not close family members or friends.

By reflecting on this story from my recent history, I didn't just create an interesting list of ways possessions played a part in my life, I was able to really see myself through these objects, how they shaped the space between the world and myself. I was able to find the value in the possessions I carried, and in so doing I was able to reveal my own personal value system. The knife isn't simply an artifact of great sentiment, it is tangible proof of how important it is to me to continually take a stand about who I am and how I am perceived. I know myself in a way I had never known before exploring the value of the imbedded meanings in that knife and that day.



SHAPING THIS SPACE BETWEEN US



Lina Melleson
Research Documentation
and Exhibition Design

problem statement It is a fundamental human experience to negotiate between one's internally held and externally ascribed understandings of self. Failure to negotiate, integrate, and assimilate these differing concepts of self leaves people vulnerable to feelings of disconnection, loneliness, and isolation. Personal possessions have the capacity to contain meanings about self; and engaging this capacity offers us a potential to generate unique insight and awareness about self. Design is an approach to thinking that can intentionally devise and develop platforms to facilitate processes of user interaction. This thesis explores the potential for designing a platform to facilitate an individual's reflexive process using their personal possessions to generate awareness and insight essential to negotiating their understandings of self.

central argument This thesis claims that a process can be designed, through which users can gain meaningful insight and knowledge into their own self and identity, by an examination of personal possessions. This heightened awareness of self can enable various positive psychological and sociological outcomes for the user. Examples of such outcomes are an increased sense of belonging, the clarification of personal values, and providing inner stability within the dynamics of today's ever changing world.

The relevance of this inquiry to the field of design stems from its ability to access concepts such as value and meaning with regards to personal possessions. Two parts of the design field are directly affected by the work examined in this inquiry. One is the production of material objects for personal value and ownership, and the other which is design of identity expressions. Though material objects play a large role in the construct of personal identities they are not limited to this role. They also play an instrumental part in communicating one's identity to others and the documentation of personal histories¹.

As designers it is crucial to reflect on the impact our design has on society, and this can be achieved through engaging users in reflection on the possessions we inject into their lives using techniques explored in this thesis. Furthermore, with regards to the design of personal and corporate identities, it is important for a designer to extract the key goals and core values of the user in order to properly represent this user. The process outlined in this inquiry provides a means by which users can share and articulate otherwise unrecognized values and core meanings that can be useful in negotiating the understanding of ourselves.

limitations and delimitations Although the tangible outcome of this thesis is a reflexive journal prototype, the primary function of this project is to examine how a reflexive journaling platform can be established to facilitate a process of self-reflection. While deep consideration was given to the formal design of this journal, the focus of my assessment is the resulting user behavior and experience.

There are various theories regarding the construct of identity and the way in which notions of self are formed. In fact, many fields of study have their own complex and differing views on the topic. The choice to combine multiple theories on the construction of identity within this exploration was deliberate, because the processes in this thesis are not attempting to define identity, but to engage individuals in reflection about their own identities. Reviewing and incorporating varying theories on the same topic has informed the scope of reflection, thereby guiding the selection of the methods utilized within the journal.

To me, identity is the articulated and shaped outer shell of self, the layer that is in constant contact with both the world of the other and the world of the self. There are aspects of self, such as a subconscious, that aren't necessarily involved in the discussion of identity. For the most part, in this thesis, self and identity are used interchangeably, but there are times when distinctions will be made to explore specific aspects of either personal identity or self.

| diagram | created as an exercise in our exhibition design class to allow us to begin visualizing the process of moving through our final year in the MFA program

literature review This section places my thesis inquiry within its theoretical and historical context.

identity In the very beginning of this inquiry I began exploring the construct of self in the context of others. To understand the social construct of self I delved into the work of Allison Weir and her theory of combining the work of Michel Foucault and Charles Taylor. Weir argues that identity can be understood in terms of “critical relations with defining communities”², and that to truly be authentic to one’s self a person must ask themselves “what is good for me?” When the answer to this question is found, this same person must critique this answer, and the connections formed based on it, continuously in relation to regimes of power and knowledge³. This basically means that a person’s identity is not simply formed in reaction to the society he or she is in, but that a person has a certain level of control in defining his or her personality by choosing different social groups to connect with. This theory played a large role in forming the theoretical framework of the construct of identity that would be used in this inquiry because it examined self in the context of society. The idea of placing self in the context of others to acquire a better understanding of self was the basis on which this thesis began, and on which the designing of a comparative platform was built.

However, through informal interviews I conducted as part of my investigation for the design of a comparative platform, I found that people of very different social and economic backgrounds struggled the negotiation between an internal and external construct of identity. This was not evident in their relationships with the communities that defined them. This discovery made it clear to me that people were not only constructing their personal identities in reaction to the societies that they were placed in, but that they were also forming an image of self that was private and separate from the contexts of these social contexts. Furthermore people found it very difficult to share these private identities with the social contexts that they existed in because they feared judgment and exclusion.

It was at this point in the investigation when I began to explore the idea of a self constructed privately and outside of any social context. The revolutionary work of psychologist Erik Erikson on the topic of identity crisis offered a broader and more holistic view of identity formation, because of its ability to accommodate both the “psycho” and the “socio” dimensions of identity. Erikson describes the “psycho” dimension of self as being partially conscious and unconscious, he goes on to say that “it is a sense of personal continuity and sameness” and that it “reaches both into the past and towards the future...” to preserve and renew itself⁴. The “socio” side of identity, on the other hand, is described by Erikson as being system of ideology that must either be confirmed or revolted against⁵. The ability of Erikson’s theories to combine both an inward and outward construct of identity was the main reason why it was chosen as the theoretical framework for the work done in this thesis. Erikson’s work, the interviews I conducted, and other scholarly work to be discussed in the process section, were the basis on which I began to explore the need for an inward reflection on self and the design of a reflexive journaling process.

possessions Very early on in this thesis exploration, and based on personal instinct alone, objects were being examined as a means for expressing identity (a way of knowing). To support this belief, research was then conducted into several different fields of study such as anthropology, consumer science, and philosophy. During my research I found that my instincts were affirmed when I uncovered a variety of roles played by objects in relation to the construct of self and the identities that we all desperately use to shield our inner selves. In the following few paragraphs, I will discuss the different roles that personal possessions can play from construction, to reinforcement, documentation, and even communication of the world of self.

In his inquiry into the lives of modern-day Londoners, anthropologist Daniel Miller explains that the study of a person’s possessions offers researchers alternative means of insight into a subject’s life narratives. He explains that these narratives, which would normally be

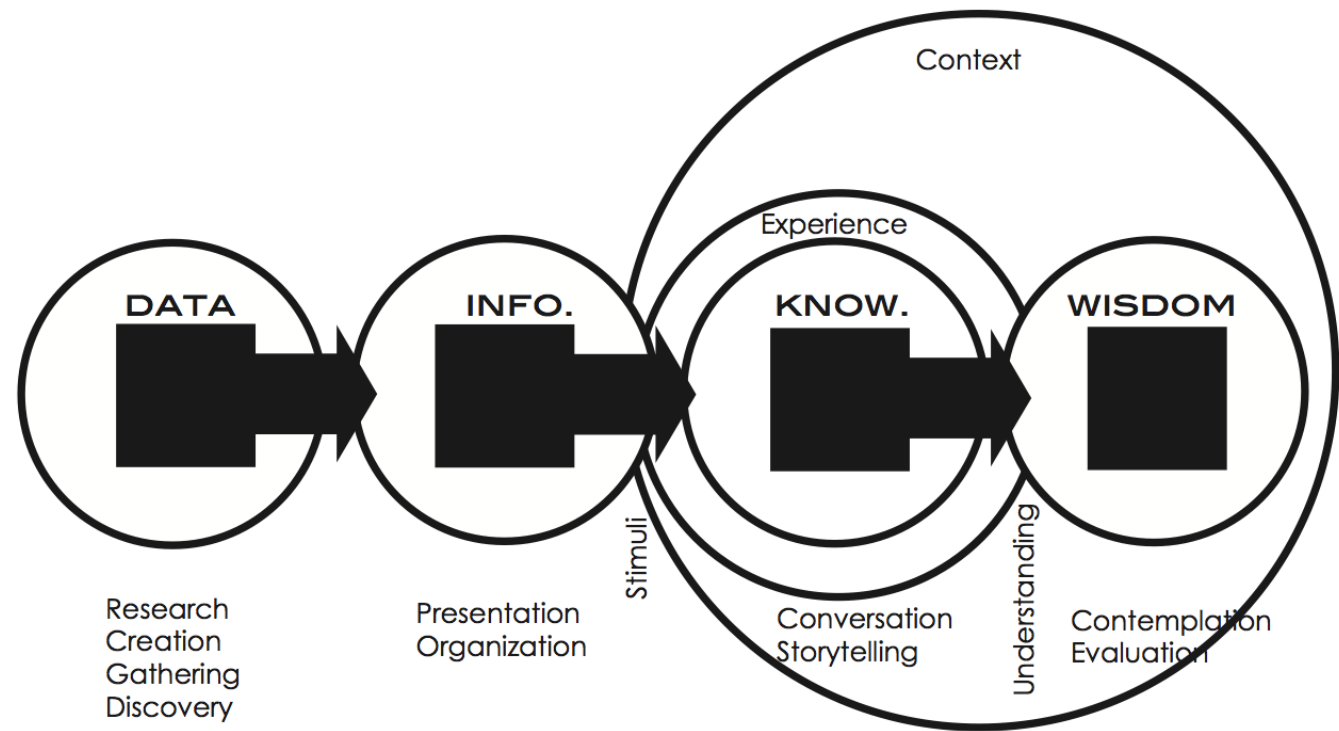
obtained through the restrictive medium of language, offer researchers access to an authentic other voice⁶. In their analysis of much literature on personal possessions, researchers Joy Monice Malnar and Frank Vodvarka summarize numerous points of view regarding the role objects play in our lives. It is clearly explained, in regard to non-verbal communication of possessions, that people felt the information gained about them from their possessions was more accurate than that gained from their behavior, and that possessions in their lives served as “props on the theatrical stage of their lives”⁷. The nonverbal nature of the information imbedded in personal possessions was a turning point in my research because it allowed me to connect research I was reading about personal possession and identity, to the work I was exploring on data collection and knowledge formation. This connection and its relevance to my inquiry will be discussed further in section below.

In Helga Dittmar’s paper on Consumer Society and its effect on our sense of identity, she confirms the role possessions play in non-verbal communication, but then she offers two more roles that possessions can play: instrumental and historic documentation of our lives⁸. By “instrumental” she is talking about the objects in our lives that allow us to do what it is we need to do: our tools, vehicles, and such things⁹. This function very much resembles Russell Belk’s views on the role of personal possessions in extending self, which is discussed below. A possession’s ability to function as a sort of tangible timeline of our existence is seen by Malnar and Vodvarka as an important point in the discussion on possessions in our lives, as it provides “a persuasive argument for a spatial and temporal fabric of objects”¹⁰. The ability to categorize possessions spatially and temporally was further confirmation that personal possession could be used as a means of extracting information about self using theories about sorting data and generating new knowledge and perspective. These ideas will be expanded in the section below.

Finally, the role that objects play in solidifying abstract concepts about self is clearly explained in the words of Douglas and Isherwood when they said, “abstract concepts are always hard to remember unless they take on

some physical appearance”¹¹. Another example of an author supporting an object’s role in symbolically extending the constructed concept of self is Ioana Bursan when she explained that “surrounding objects help us reminding, and defining who we are”¹².

Russell Belk’ work on possessions and the extended self is similarly interested in the field of possessions. Belk introduces the following main categories of possessions that extend self into the world: body; internal processes; personal identifying characteristics; ideas and experiences; those persons, places,³ and things to which one feels attached¹³. Since this thesis is interested in creating processes of self-awareness through reflection on possessions, these categories are used as a means to organize the possessions into manageable categories. Belk explains that possessions can, at times, literally extend a person’s self into the world. This is the case of a tool which allows the person to do things one is otherwise incapable of, or symbolically extend self, as is the case of a uniform that allows people to convince themselves that they are different people than they would be without them¹⁴. The combined literal and symbolic ways in which possessions extend self has allowed for the design of processes that speak to both a tangible and intangible relationship with possessions. This duality of function also allowed for the design or processes that access the same meaning from different possible angles.



| **diagram** | overview of understanding and the transference of wisdom

data and knowledge In the book *Information Anxiety 2*, contributor Nathan Shedroff presents an overview of understanding, in which he breaks down the process of the transference of knowledge and the acquisition of wisdom. According to Shedroff there are specific steps that one can follow to achieve wisdom about a certain topic. First, one must go through the process of collecting data. Then that data is turned into information by organizing it and placing into context. Next this information must then be converted into knowledge through a process of examining and experiencing the original data in many different ways, and in so doing creating different perspectives about

this data. The final step of understanding, which is also the hardest to transfer, is wisdom. Wisdom is achieved through a process of introspection, pattern-matching, contemplations, retrospection, and interpretation¹⁵.

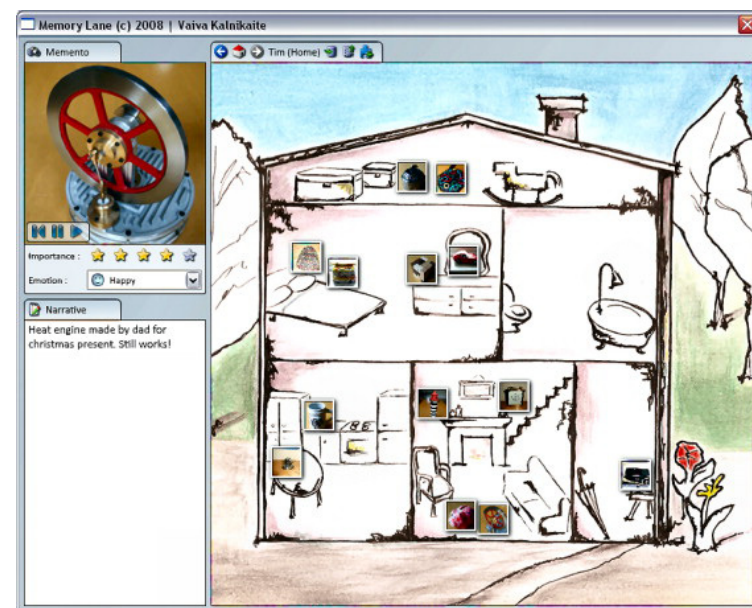
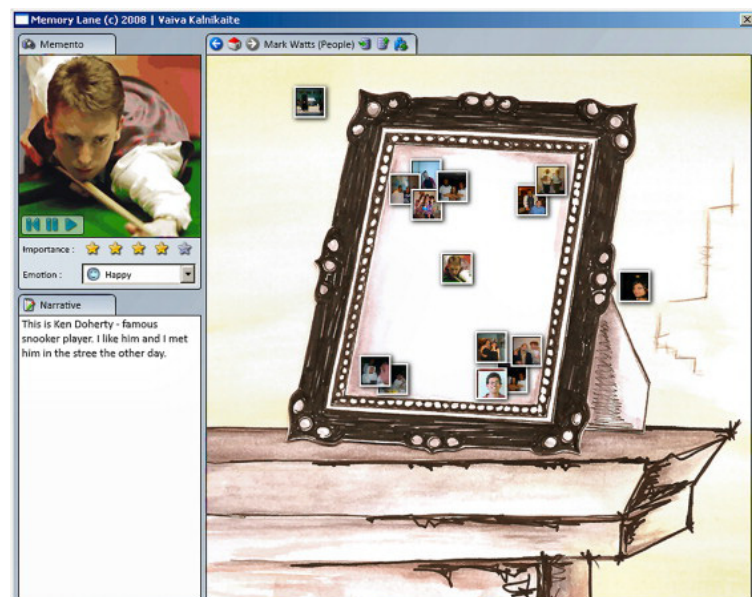
The work presented by Shedroff became the underpinning framework by which I designed of the reflexive journal. To do this I used the fact that possessions, as mentioned earlier, have an inherent imbedded value system that people recognize on a nonverbal level. So I began to work with personal possessions as if they were neat little packets of information about self, that

could serve as initiators of a process that leads towards wisdom about self and identity.

The work of Richard Saul Wurman was also invaluable in providing a means by which differing vantage points could be achieved for the same set of data. The LATCH system outlined by Wurman was the structure that I felt could be extremely useful for organizing the complexity of the data coming into this process (possessions). Through this system users are able to sort their data in a finite number of ways (location; alphabetical; time; category; hierarchy), which allows them to generate differing vantage points, and also enables them to understand the relationship between the differing bodies of information¹⁶. Wurman explains this when he says that “each new vantage point, each mode of organization will create a new structure. And each new structure will enable you to see a different meaning, acting as a new method of classification from which the whole can be understood.”¹⁷. This structure provides an approach that can allow people to engage in a “mapping” of self.

One way in which the work Wurman was applied in the design of the reflexive journal was the “sorting” section of the journal. This section provided a list of possessions that they needed to identify and illustrate in an empty column, the users were asked to photocopy their illustrations, and then over the course of the next six pages they had to sort these possessions using the LATCH system.

This scholarly research presents an inherent duality when considering the construction, reinforcement, and manifestation of identity. It also reveals a need for both a process of personal reflection, and one of comparative examination. My focus on the reflexive journal process must ultimately be complemented with the comparative platform, which is considered a future direction of this inquiry.



precedents This section presents examples and critique of other ways in which designers and researchers approached similar topics in their work.

augmented memory In the last few years a great deal of research has explored the creation of augmented memory systems. Specifically there are two projects I have used to consider directions in my thesis project.

the living memory box (2003) was created as a means of capturing the experiences, hopes, dreams, pains, and pleasures of people¹⁸. It's focused on the concept of creating a home appliance for family archiving. This project is relevant to my design direction because previous scholarly research into the topic of personal possessions has shown that a central function of possessions in people's lives is to act as a personal archive of the events in their life. In fact, when I began this thesis project I held the perspective that this was the only means by which possessions could support a person's sense of self. The Living Memory Box is unique in that its user testing involved two groups from what they call the "family memory spectrum"¹⁹, the digital camera users and the scrapbookers. It is also unique in that it also chose to use a journal as a way of opening the groups cognitive awareness to the domain of interest. The findings from this study on both groups' are particularly interesting to me because they offered support for my exploration of a creative journal serving as a platform of the process of engaging with possessions. This study was concluded by reviewing a number of key findings²⁰, the relevance of which will be discussed here. The first relevant finding provided was

to develop the annotation and organization of memories into a process of personal expression; they noted that this feedback came from the scrapbooking group that found the process of journaling therapeutic. Their second relevant finding was to make the inclusion of any object possible. These findings are useful to my project by supporting my use of Belk's breakdown of possessions, which actually includes non-tangible objects such as dreams and sensations. The final relevant recommendation was to encourage storytelling at any point. The relevance of this recommendation will be explained in the discussion of the following precedent.

memory lane (2011) is a digital-memory archiving tool that allows users to input images of meaningful digital memorabilia for the purposes of organization and self- reflection. It also focused very heavily on the role narrative plays in augmenting digital memorabilia. The interface allows users to organize their possessions into three main contexts; "home" that is illustrated by the image of a house, "places" that is illustrated by an interactive map, and "people" that are represented by a large illustration of a photo frame. It is interesting that their findings indicate people would be more interested in adding narratives to their objects only if the objects were going to be shared with others, because they felt it redundant to attach a story of an object that they already knew very well²¹. Furthermore, in their Future Directions section, the authors felt allowing users to share their digital collections with friends and family might lead to a new form of communication application²².

| **screen captures** | *screen examples from prototype used in Memory Lane project*

| **photograph** | *physical prototype of Living Memory Box project*

| top screen capture |
one example of Jonathan Harris's "movements" from his We Feel Fine project, where each movement allows for a different method of searching the data available on his site

| below screen capture |
collection of featured stories on Cowbird

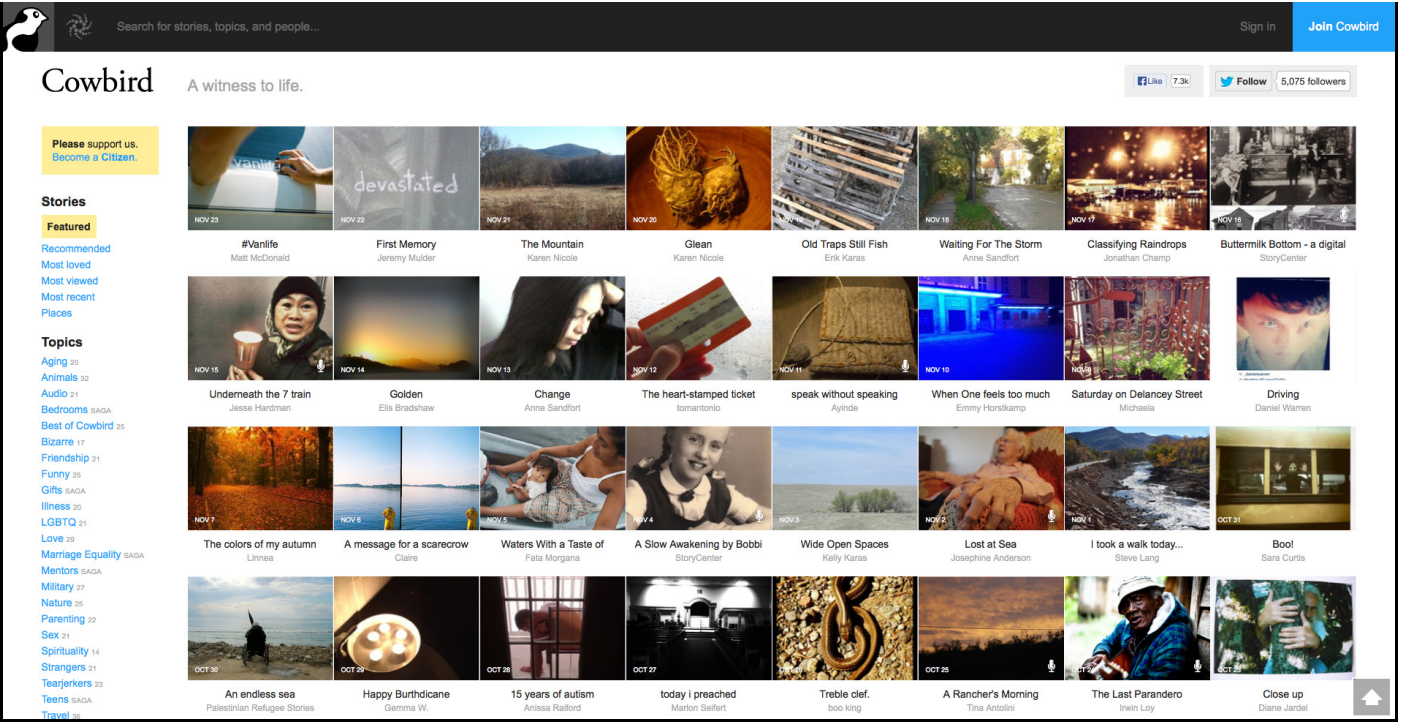
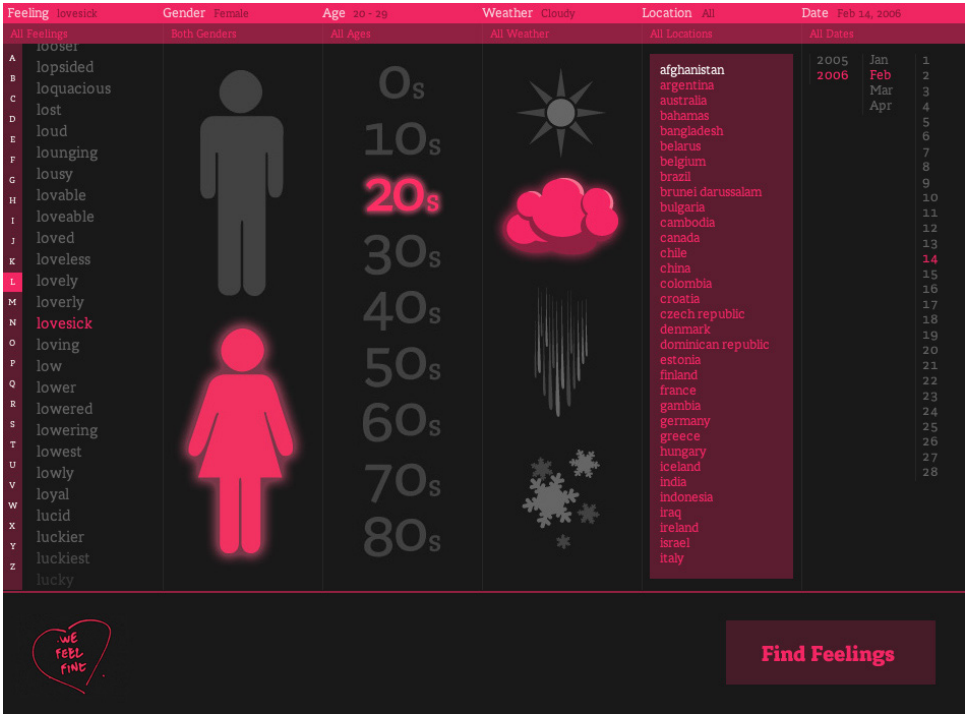
narrative and data The work of Jonathan Harris has been an inspiration in considering the potential of exposing the authentic voice of my subjects through their own personal narratives. He has consistently created projects that expose the very essence of the human condition in very creative and playful ways. Both of the following precedents provide examples of the way in which platforms can facilitate the process of generating a perspective unique to the user.

cowbird was created in 2011, and is self-described as "the public library of human experience"²³. This library is created by the simple marriage of an image and a story, the images act as a tangible artifact and document of the story, and the text is the in-depth exploration of the experience that is represented by the photograph. In the Process and Methodology section, I explain how I experimented with the addition of narrative to enhance the sharing of one's narrative of self through the medium of an object.

I was drawn to Cowbird because of its content and its design. It's simple format allows the viewer to easily submerge themselves in the life story that is being shared. I find beauty in Harris's ability to create a community of people by simply labeling paid members Citizens, and free users Nomads. The work in this project is a precedent for my thesis because it is an example of very simple and yet powerful design that is able to engage users in sharing their experience of being in the world in a poetic way. I have used his example of metaphor (citizen. . .) in creating my own digital platform. While my project does not focus on the

design of a graphical user interface, it was considered when exploring the potentials of a digital comparative platform. Cowbird is a useful example of a website using a metaphor effectively to create a community of people and a shared space. This demonstrates a great deal about people's ability to imagine what a community would look like in their own minds. This has revealed a limitation of the Memory Lane project which chose to provide static images of a home and a photo frame for all users to place their objects and personal photographs into.

we feel fine (2009) is the project that initially got me interested in the field of design. It is described as a "comprehensive contemporary portrait of the world's emotional landscape"²⁴. This site pulls information from blogs all over the world by searching their content for the words "I feel". Though this is another example of providing insight into the lives of mankind, I was drawn to this project initially because of the interactive statistics that Harris called Movements, through which one could sort and resort information to gain different perspectives on the same information. Because I was able to see with my own eyes which emotion was the most prevalent at any given moment, or which country of the world was being more vocal at any given time, I felt extremely connected to this group of people and this project in general. This work specifically relates to my thesis in that it provides precedent for collecting mountains upon mountains of information and providing the user with the tools to generate their own unique perspectives on the world.





Name: Cecília Furtado
Age: 14
Location: João Pessoa, Brazil
Occupation: Student
Website: <http://ce-ph.deviantart.com>
List:

- Box full of memories
- Favorite necklaces (my dad gave them both and both have heart pendants)
- My "Life" bracelet
- A horse pin that my friend gave to me
- A ring that a hippie gave to me
- The book I am reading at the moment (at that moment it was "Emma", by Jane Austen)
- My favorite bookmark
- A little pot with glitter
- My Canon EOS 5000
- Cell phone
- Ipod
- Miniature horse (now I have two)
- My Nikon Coolpix S3100
- My Nikon Coolpix P500 (using to take the picture)
- Favorite pants
- Favorite All-Stars
- My brother (it was extremely hard convincing him to stay there)



If your house was burning, what would you take with you? It's a conflict between what's practical, valuable and sentimental. What you would take reflects your interests, background and priorities. Think of it as an interview condensed into one question.



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Buy the Book!

symbolic objects The following precedents demonstrate a way in which objects can be used to communicate with an audience about a person.

burning house This project poses the following prompt to its users for participation "If your house was burning, what would you take with you? It's a conflict between what's practical, valuable and sentimental. What you would take reflects your interests, background and priorities. Think of it as an interview condensed into one question."²⁵. Users are then asked to use a form to submit their images, a list of the objects, and a link to their website. This project was of interest to me because it represents the most basic form of what I wanted to achieve when I started my thesis project. I wanted people to share their most valued possessions as a means for others to get to know them. As I read about possessions, and as I learned about means by which I could learn even more about others and myself through our possessions, the project expanded. It began to include means of communication between users, ways in which each object could have its own dedicated post and voice, and even ways in which the data collected about users and their objects could be explored to provide different vantage points about the concepts of value in relation to possessions.

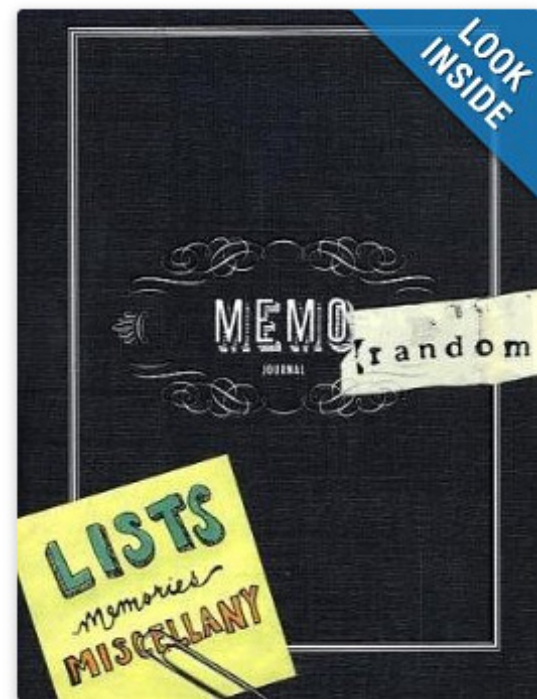
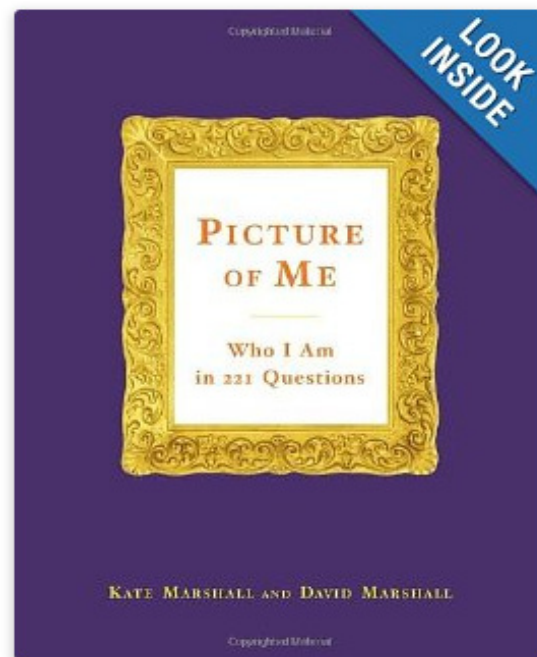
This project is interesting to me, and different from the two projects about digitally augmenting memories, because many of the objects in these images are actually statements about personal voice. Even the prompt indicates that the objects should speak to a person's interests and ends by asking the users to consider this an interview condensed into one question. This means that, unlike the augmented memory projects, this project actually attempts to use objects as tools for communicating about self and its interests as well as its personal memorabilia. In addition to adding possessions that communicate about a person, the added fact that these are the objects that would be saved from the fire adds a certain level of priority to them above all other possessions, which gives a little hint at the user's personal value system. This project shaped the first of three sections in the reflexive journal: the section that is directly related to exploring and understanding personal voice.



| **screen capture** | shows one submission to the Burning House project

| **photograph** | grandma Ilva, Mario's wife. By Camilla Carrambone

portraits of my family Another project that shows very nicely how objects can speak on behalf of their owners is the photographic series "Portraits of My Family", by artist Camilla Catrambone. Unlike the images from The Burning House Project, the only clue about the owner that we have is that of their relationship with the author. For example, the above image is titled "grandma Ilva, Mario's wife"²⁶. This project is very personal, and has no sense of prioritization such as the imaginary fire in the Burning House project, but somehow you can still get a sense of what mattered in grandma Ilva's life. What's interesting about the last two projects, that again wasn't explored in the augmented memory projects, is the inclusion of the possessions in life that allow people to do what it is they do, the instrumental objects that allowed Ilva to sew her clothes, or serve elegant tea parties, the things that made it possible for her to be the person she was in the world.



creative journals The following examples were all considered because, as precedents for the creation of the reflexive journaling process in this thesis, they are examples of prompting users through questions and activities.

picture of me (2009) is a journal that allows users to explore their views of self through various questions. It is mostly question-and-answer based and also has a few examples of actual activities. This journal is a precedent for my project in that both projects are about self, though mine has a specific focus on possessions in relation to self.

memorandom (2010) provides various prompts for creating lists about events in a person's life. The design of this journal is a more useful precedent than *Picture of Me* because of its grungy and messy look that invites users to be playful when documenting things about their own experience of life. This journal more fully informed the design of the reflexive platform within my project than *Picture of Me*; however, it appears to focus on a younger age group than my own.

wreck this journal (2012) was created as a means of loosening up users to the messy nature of creativity. Its playful and experimental prompts put the user at ease with making mistakes, which is one of the biggest blocks for any creative activity. This journal has many different examples of prompts that could be appropriated or modified to fit the goals of the process I'd like to facilitate. The relevant prompts that I found in this journal teach users to be mindful of things around them, and to become curious about the possessions in their lives.



investigation The reflexive journaling process that was designed, prototyped, and evaluated in this inquiry was achieved as a result of a great deal of investigation into the possibility of creating a comparative platform. The goal of the comparative platform was to create wisdom about self through sharing narratives about personal possessions. Through experimentation, research, and exploration I noticed a gap that needed to be addressed before the comparative platform could have a more authentic participation and impact as was desired. While I found that the use of the comparative platform revealed meaningful insights about self. I also found that most potential users needed assistance to go through a process of deep reflection and introspection necessary to establish such meaningful insights. It became apparent that they needed a means to loosen themselves up creatively to dig deeply into their personal narrative of self. This realization aligned very well with the work of Shedroff about creating opportunities for developing wisdom and insight into a certain topic, which was discussed earlier in this document.

The insights into the creation of the reflexive journaling process were also aided by personal explorations and creations that I conducted in relation to my own personal possessions. These insights were crucial in allowing me to go from a place of knowing and understanding about the role personal possessions played in my narrative of self, to a place of wisdom about the entire process. These explorations and creations became the basis from which I designed each prompt in the reflexive journal process.

The following section documents the process by which the investigations in this project have evolved from moments of curious exploration and purposeful experimentation, into a focused experiment of how an individual's process of constructing, reinforcing, and manifesting their personal identity can be revealed.

comparative platform When I began my thesis exploration I knew I had a general interest in the concept of belonging. Having explored the ideas about the topic a little during our workshop in Amsterdam and

a few times during my first year in the MFA program, I knew it was a very complex topic. To begin working on idea generation, we were instructed to break our concepts down into subtopics and sub-problems. After a bit of brainstorming on the matter, I came to the realization that, for me, belonging could be broken down to two essential components: feeling as though your authentic self is known, and that that self is accepted. Since I had already explored the idea of acceptance in a previous project, I decided to begin working on the idea of being known to others and to one's self.

At this point of the thesis exploration, I knew I wanted to explore the concept of knowing and being known, but I had no clear idea how to approach this topic. The direction I ended up taking was the result of the following experience, which triggered many moments of personal reflection. One night, after I had been reading through posts on several different design blogs, I stumbled upon the story of designer Salvatore laconesi and his struggle with brain cancer. The post on the TED blog explained that he had been recently diagnosed with brain cancer and that he decided to hack into his medical files to upload and open-source his files to the entire world. He was hoping that people would assist him with finding a cure or that they would make art with his medical files. I remember laying there in the dark, in my bed, with the light from my phone illuminating a very small portion of the room and just staring into his skull cavity. I don't know if I had hoped that something from my previous education in molecular biology would emerge from the depths where I had long buried it and offer me a solution to this mans problems, or if by somehow giving him time from my day I was honoring his plight in this world, but I felt compelled to linger there with that photo. Not being able to move past that moment I decided to bookmark the page, turn off my phone, and go to sleep. The story stayed with me for some time before I realized one day that I felt like I knew him, like I heard his authentic voice through the object that he shared with the entire world, this cancer of the mind, and so I began exploring the notion that objects could offer a means by which to know someone.

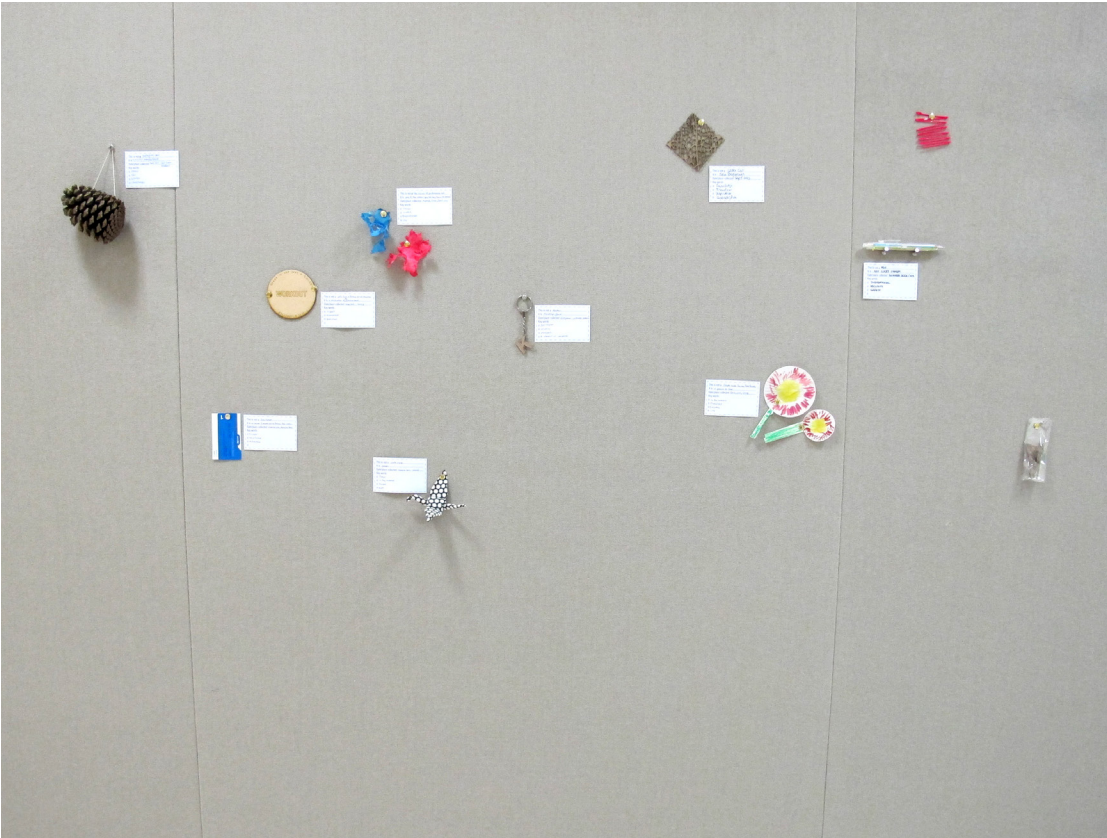
| **mri scan** | Salvatore laconesi's brain cancer



| painting | René Magritte's painting *The Treason of Images*

| photograph | shows a collection of objects collected from my MFA peers in response to one of my very first prompts

| call for participation | the flyer that was sent out digitally to invite people to participate in my exploration



prompt I was curious about my ability to prompt my fellow grad students with just the right prompt so as to recreate the feelings I had experienced while looking at the brain scan. I wanted to see if I could create a feeling of knowing, and of hearing someone's authentic voice through an object that they possessed. I began by prompting them with questions asking them to show me their possessions. The prompts were very simple at first: I'd ask them to "show me something you carry with you everyday, that you don't actually have to carry with you". Sometimes the prompts would yield meaningful objects, other times it wouldn't, but the process allowed me to sharpen my skill of designing prompts. Over the course of a few weeks, I began to incorporate things that I had been researching to insure that users would have to really think about the possessions they'd be sharing before they shared them.

One day I stumbled onto René Magritte's painting *The Treason of Images*, which is a painting of a pipe with the text "this is not a pipe" underneath it. This painting

is challenging the viewer not to be fooled by the illusion of what things are; I wanted to challenge my user to not simply accept the superficial nature of their possessions. The final prompt that I sent out to my test users explained the type of possession I was wanting them to explore. I provided context about the object, and then I asked them to fill in a sentence about the possession that read "this is not a ____" followed by "this is a ____". The prompt was posted online, and over the course of a week, I accepted several submissions that produced the exact outcome that I had designed.

By completing this prompt users would have finished the first three steps in Nathan Shedroffs diagram about the transition of knowledge. They collected data (an object), the information I provided them about the object placed it into a context, and then sentence they had to fill out was specifically designed to challenge their perception of their personal possessions.

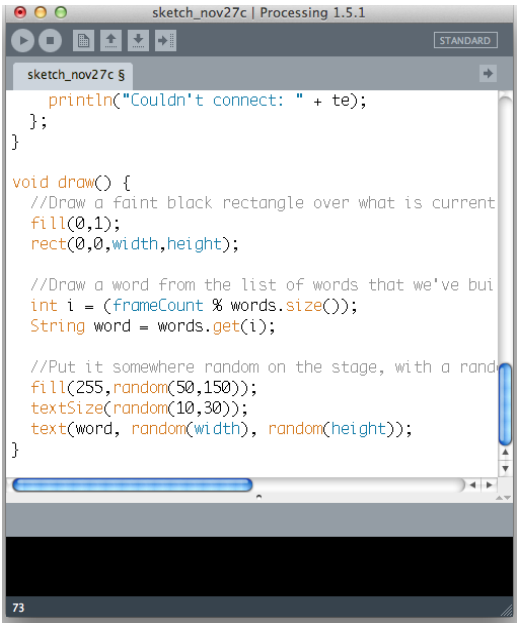


CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

TO ANYONE WHO HAS EVER TAKEN OWNERSHIP OF AN ARTIFACT OF GREAT PERSONAL AND/OR SENTIMENTAL MEANING. TO ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE TAKEN OBJECTS WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY THAT IS YOUR LIFE. TO ANYONE INTERESTED IN KNOWING OTHERS AND BEING KNOWN. THIS IS A CALL FOR PARTICIPATION.

Guidelines for Participation:

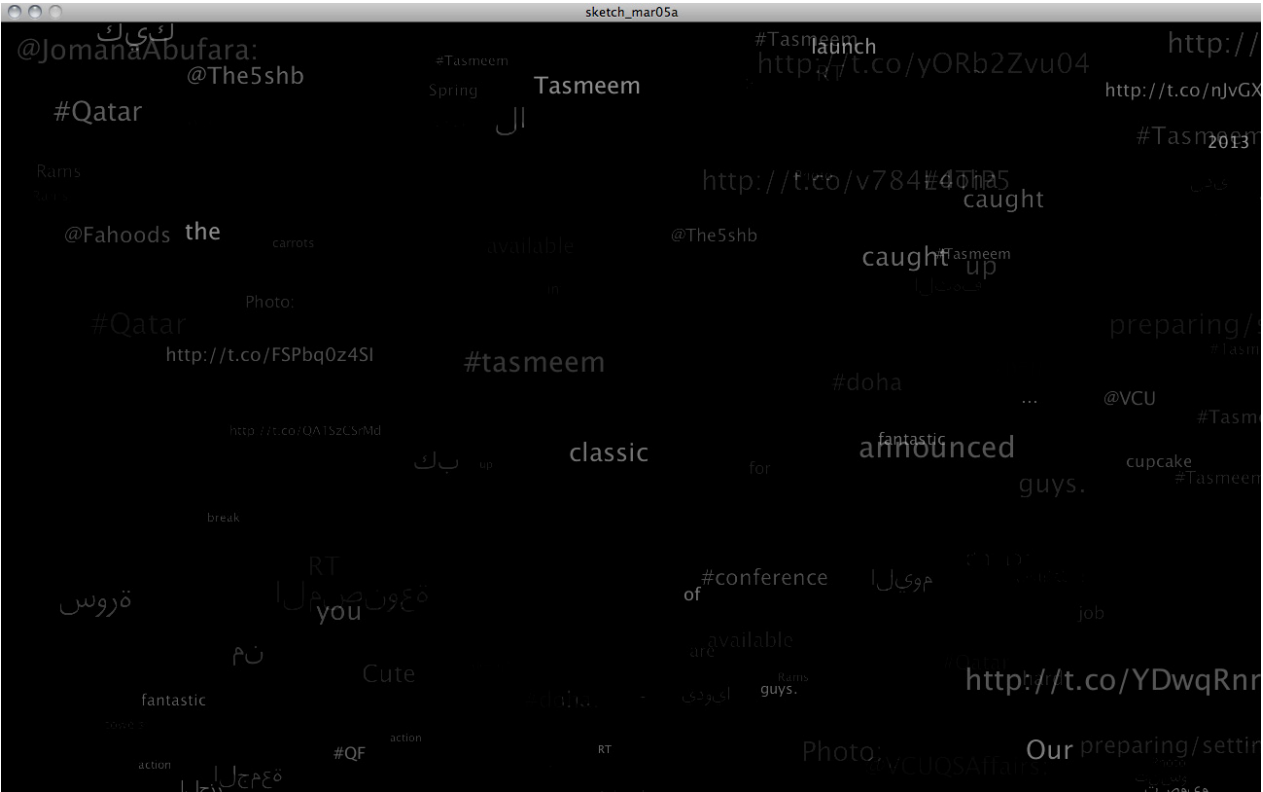
1. An artifact is an object that is man made, or has in some way been affected by interactions with man. For this call we would like to exclude all gifts, trophies, and photographs. The artifact should be low in economic value, while high in personal/sentimental meaning.
2. To participate, send a high resolution image of an artifact you have collected to the email address: ma7sain@gmail.com. Each participant is able to submit as many images as they would like.
3. In addition to the image, please fill in the following sentences describing your artifact: "This is not ___[noun]___, this is ___[verb]___. Collected on ___[approximate date]___, in ___[location]___. It is now kept ___[location]___." Send the completed sentence with your image to the email above.
4. Deadline for submissions is midnight on Wednesday, Oct 10th, 2012.



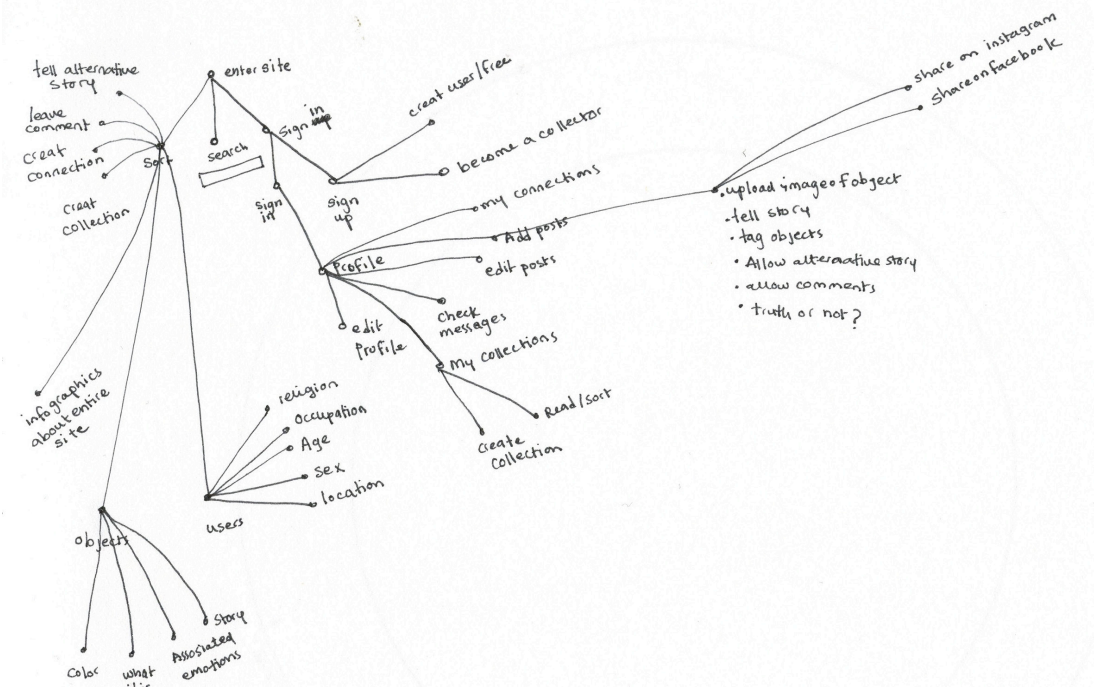
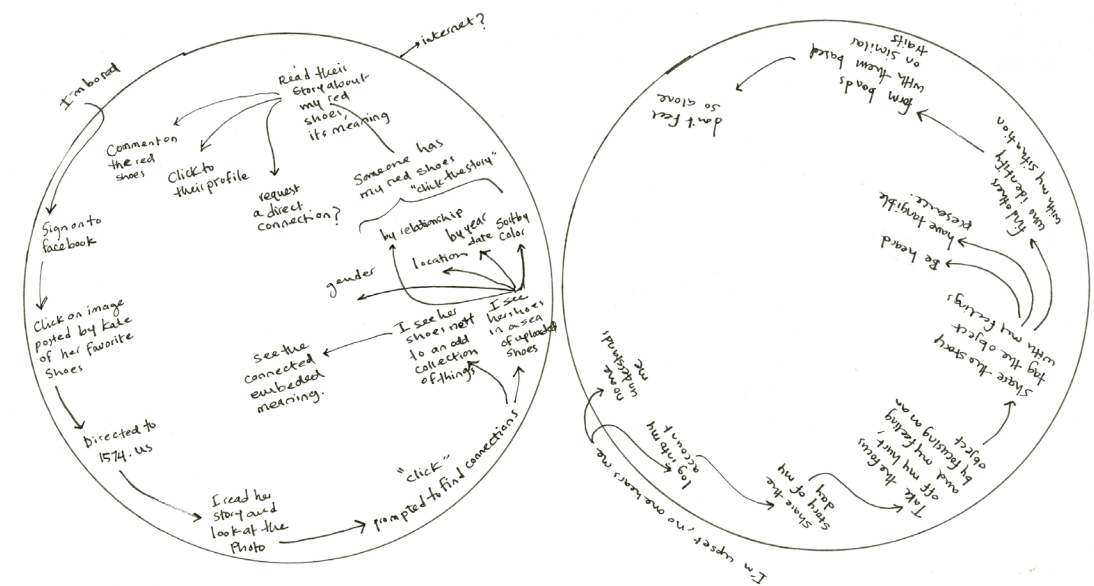
digital vs. analogue Early on in my explorations into the creation of a comparative platform for data sorting, I was interested in both digital and analogue applications for this platform. At one point, I plotted a timeline of my life onto a sheet of paper, which I then imposed onto a collection of my personal photographs depicting each stage of my life. This timeline existed in a little wooden box with cranks on each side, allowing users to scroll through my life. On another occasion I worked with Processing to appropriate a digital sketch that harvests tweets tagged with specific hashtags and displays them along with the sentences they existed in. These explorations helped me understand the different impacts that a medium could have on the experience of a project: and it is one of the main reasons that I felt that the reflexive journal should be paper-based journal instead of digital.

| photograph | *early explorations into the creation of an analogue tool for interacting with personal data*

| **screen capture** | *some explorations into the digital possibility of harvesting data from twitter, using processing*

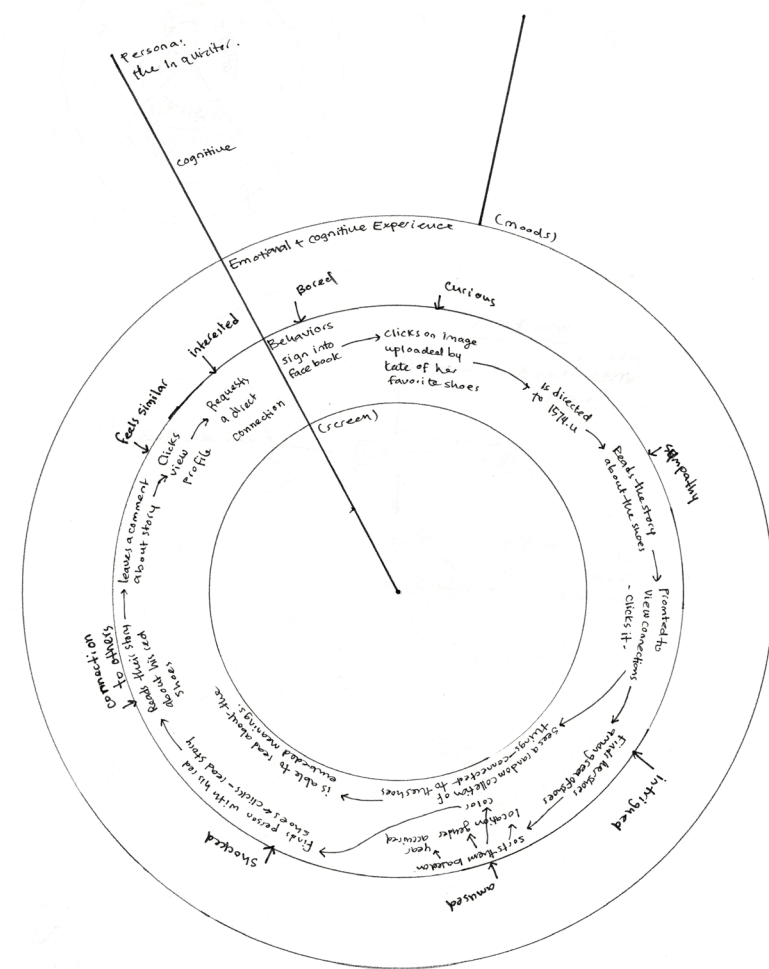


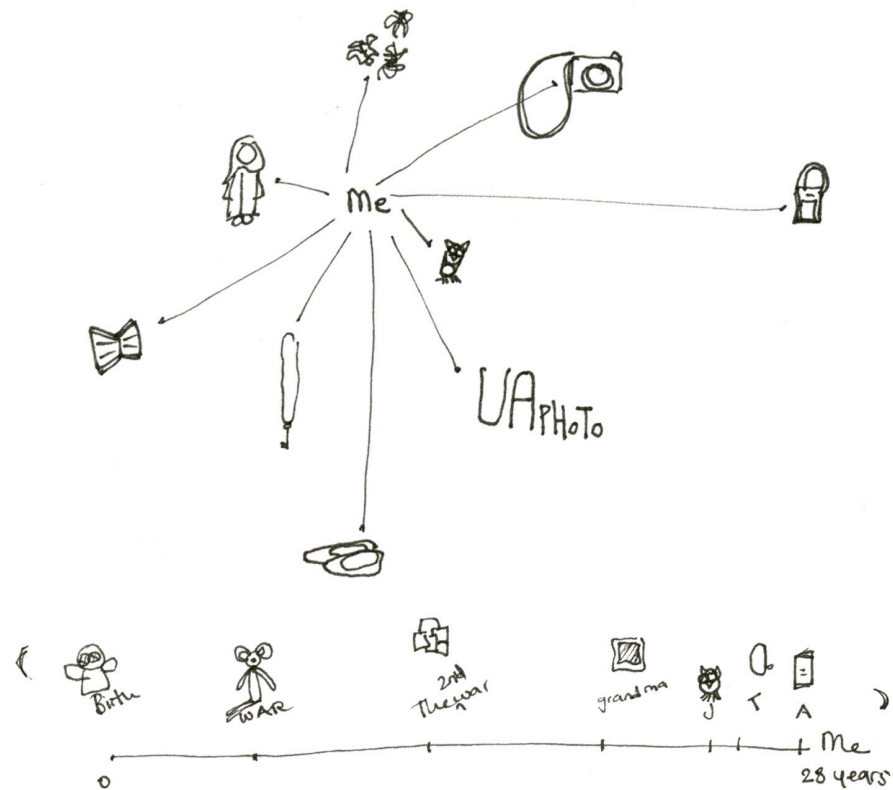
| **diagram on facing page** |
refined exploration of one
user's potential experience
of the proposed compara-
tive platform



users Before I continued to explore the potential of a comparative platform any further, I was asked by my advisors to consider defining a target group. This request would take me on a two month winding road that led in a direction that I ultimately did not pursue. What I found through conducting interviews with this possible target group was that the problems associated with a shaky sense of identity were global and fundamentally human. This discovery affirmed my belief that the project should in fact be without a specific target group, and I returned to working on the project as I had been before.

It was at this point in the inquiry that I began to explore the potential users and their possible user experiences in relation to the comparative platform. To do so, I began to visualize the possible scenarios of use for users of my digital platform. These proposed processes took into consideration the emotional and cognitive experience of the user, and the behaviors resulting from these emotions and thought processes and how those experiences would shape their interaction with the platform. These scenarios were created for four personas that I developed as users of my platform, and they were extremely helpful in understanding what a user's step-by-step experience of the tool might look like. This in turn gave me the ability to spot problems in the tool before it was put into user testing. Some of the questions to arise after looking at the global picture of the purposed platform were: where is the value in my project? Who would gravitate towards it? Why would they use it? Where does the meaning lay within objects/possession? Can the meaning survive if the form is recreated? Can the meaning imbedded in a possession survive in written narratives about this possession?





| sketch | one of many sketches to depict the spatial and temporal experience of my personal possessions, while attempting to uncover possible connections between the two types of experiences of possessions

personal explorations To begin working on these questions I delved into literature about possessions and their role in personal identity. I began reading the work of Helga Dittmar and was fascinated by the idea that possessions were not simply tools for documenting personal history, that people shared both a temporal and spatial relationship with their possessions²⁷. What fascinated me the most about this discovery was the fact that I had repeatedly written the words "temporal" and "spatial" all over my sketchbook as I tried to access how people relate to their possessions. Seeing that my personal intuition about possessions was correct, I wondered what other knowledge could come from exploring possessions on a personal level, through making and writing about my own possessions. So I began exploring the questions that I had through a series of explorations with making objects, writing narratives, and recreating emotions, in hopes that I could generate a type of wisdom that can only come about through a process of personal reflection, introspection, and creation.

reincarnation First I decided I would begin to recreate objects that had meaning to me. I started with my father's cigarette lighter, and with my first doll. I wanted to know if, how, and why meaning could survive recreating the objects. When I recreated the doll, I decided that it should be to scale, the scale of the doll in relation to my body as a child when I first got her (her name is Lolly Dolly). There was something about giving her her original scale that automatically returned me to this little child holding a doll for comfort. I was no longer the adult, I was a child again, and this doll was my protection and comfort. This experiment allowed me to see that by recreating the original encounter of my use of this doll (her being this large squishy thing I can hold onto) I was able to transport myself through time and space to recreate the feelings associated with that original encounter. I went into the experiment thinking that scale would be a factor in understanding meaning, and realized it was only important in so much as it helped me recreate the original situation. I confirmed this thought when I recreated another doll in a very small scale and did not have the same emotional reaction to the recreated doll.



| her | my sister clutching my doll, in a moment documented by me

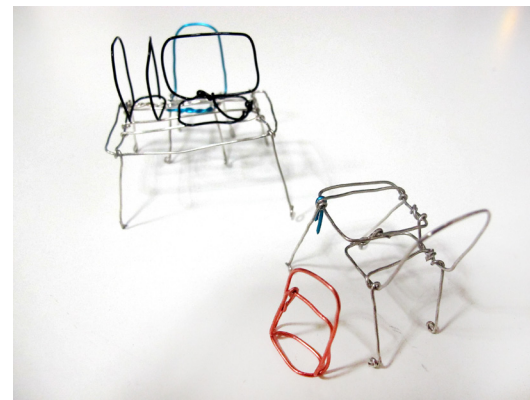
| me | reexperiencing my first possession; mirroring my sisters emotions



| **lighters** | my father, embodied in an object

relationships With the lighters on the other hand, I chose to recreate them while maintaining both shape and size. This time I also wanted to explore the concept of creating multiples. I decided to recreate the lighters to represent the amount of times I had witnessed my father smoking in front of me, which was a lot. When examining the finished exploration I found that the number of the lighters and the bare white chalk-like look of the molded lighters evoked this sense of repetition and of continuity. This repetition and continuity reflected the relationship that I have with my father; his consistent presence in my life somehow symbolically manifest in this object that was always not too far away from him.

What I took from those two experiments was that what survives the recreation of an object is in fact where the meaning lays. For example, if the meaning in the lighter had been its function as a lighter, then the fact that I didn't manage to retain its function when I recreated its form would have made the recreated lighter meaningless. But since the meaning was symbolic, both in that the object was a document of a certain part of my life history, and that it was a personal symbol of my father, the recreated object maintained its meaning when it was recreated because the symbolism wasn't imbedded in its function or the material of its original form.



environments After working on the first two experiments with recreating the form of possessions I became curious about what similar explorations would look like with the different types of possessions described by Belk. In this exploration I recreated the form of an environment that will forever mean a great deal to me. It is the space that I formed the most important friendship of my life in. Over the stretch of two years my best friend and I shared our tears and laughter, our experiences about being teachers for the first time, and our dreams for the future. When I chose to recreate the form, I challenged myself to produce three different "scenes" and I wasn't surprised that each recreation is a representation of a method by which we shaped the space between ourselves. The scene with the desk and chair facing the student chair represents how dedicated we were to being the best teachers we possibly could, we would spend hours silently working near each other. The scene with the student chairs facing another chair with a laptop represents the times we allowed ourselves to let loose and watch a film (With permission, of course. We were too stuffy to do that without permission). Finally the single student chair, a symbol of all the moments in which I sat pouring my heart out to my best friend, a symbol of all the times I received comfort, council, and love.

What I took away from this exploration was an understanding about the representational nature of possessions. Representation, in relation to personal possessions, does not directly translate to others. If I presented a student chair to others as a symbol of my experience and life, it is not easy to read the real complexity of that symbol, certainly not like one would read symbolism in art or design. That is because the context in which these symbols occurred are so personal, they are only accessible by those who were involved. So unlike global symbols (like a peace sign), the chair could only be truly deciphered by two people in this world. I also learned that, with reflection and thought, any possession (like this classroom) can yield a representative symbol, an object or mark that can be read by its creator and those involved with its original life in the world.

| **school chairs** | the space that existed between us, reduced to three symbolic gestures



metaphor This experimentation explores the idea of being possessed by my own possession, which in this case is clinical depression. The process of giving shape to my "protective shell" has been equally upsetting and liberating at the same time. Being aware of my depression gives me the chance to choose whether I do, in fact, want to hide behind it or break through my transparent shell and let myself out for a while. In creating this piece I wanted to explore what it means to use metaphors to express something too difficult to discuss. This work was inspired by the idea of the black dog, which was a metaphor that Winston Churchill used to talk to those around him about his depression. For me, I have always thought of my depression and desire to keep people at an arms length as a sort of transparent shell. This shell was created to protect me from harm, and yet it is often the reason I am unable to surround myself with the love and compassion that I crave. In creating this piece I was able to understand the power a metaphor has in shaping a nontangible thought/feeling/idea into a real thing. Being able to see what its like for the little figure stuck in a transparent jar helps me see the pain I feel, the sadness I feel, and the fact that there is a way out of it if I choose, a way to escape the shell just beyond the clouds.

I wild geese I Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
 You do not have to walk on your knees
 For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
 You only have to let the soft animal of your body
 love what it loves.
 Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
 Meanwhile the world goes on.
 Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
 are moving across the landscapes,
 over the prairies and the deep trees,
 the mountains and the rivers.
 Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
 are heading home again.
 Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
 the world offers itself to your imagination,
 calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting
 over and over announcing your place
 in the family of things.



voice This exploration is about a poem that gave me a sense of peace within my soul that I've never experienced before in my life. You could say that a poem is tangible object since it exists in written form, but it is actually the reading of the poem by the author that moves me in a very unique way. The author is in her late seventies and her voice is filled with the experience of a life well lived, and I find that her poem, when read in her voice, offers me a sort of lifeline when I am feeling really low. The piece that I created is my attempt to transfer the experience of the words from a nontangible state into a realized form that exists in the world.

So I decided to bring the wild geese in her poem to life, and to allow them to fly through my exhibition space. To create this piece I knew I would be folding geese for hours, but that is what I wanted, I wanted to sit and fold wild geese for hours as I let her poem sink into my soul, the repetitive motion of the folding like the repetitive murmur of a person meditating on their own personal mantra. I wanted her words to reverberate within me, so that they could, in the future, repeat themselves to me when I found myself in a dark place, and allow me to see that I do have a place in the world.

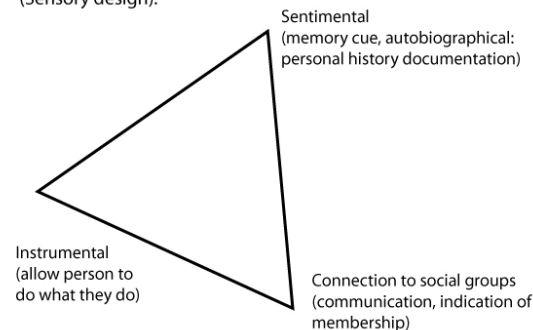
| **wild geese** | *manifesting personal voice in the creation of a tangible object*

| **depression** | *metaphorically sharing one of the most painful possessions to own*

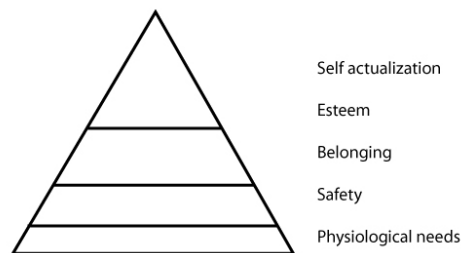
Possessions (Belk's categories):

Tangible	Nontangible
Objects we own	Personal identifying characteristics (age, occupation..)
Body parts	Abstract ideas (morals, laws..)
Other people	Psychological and intraorgasmic sensations (sensory reactions, dreams...)
Physical environment	

Categories of objects
(Sensory design):



Every possession must satisfy a human need
(Maslow's hierarchy):



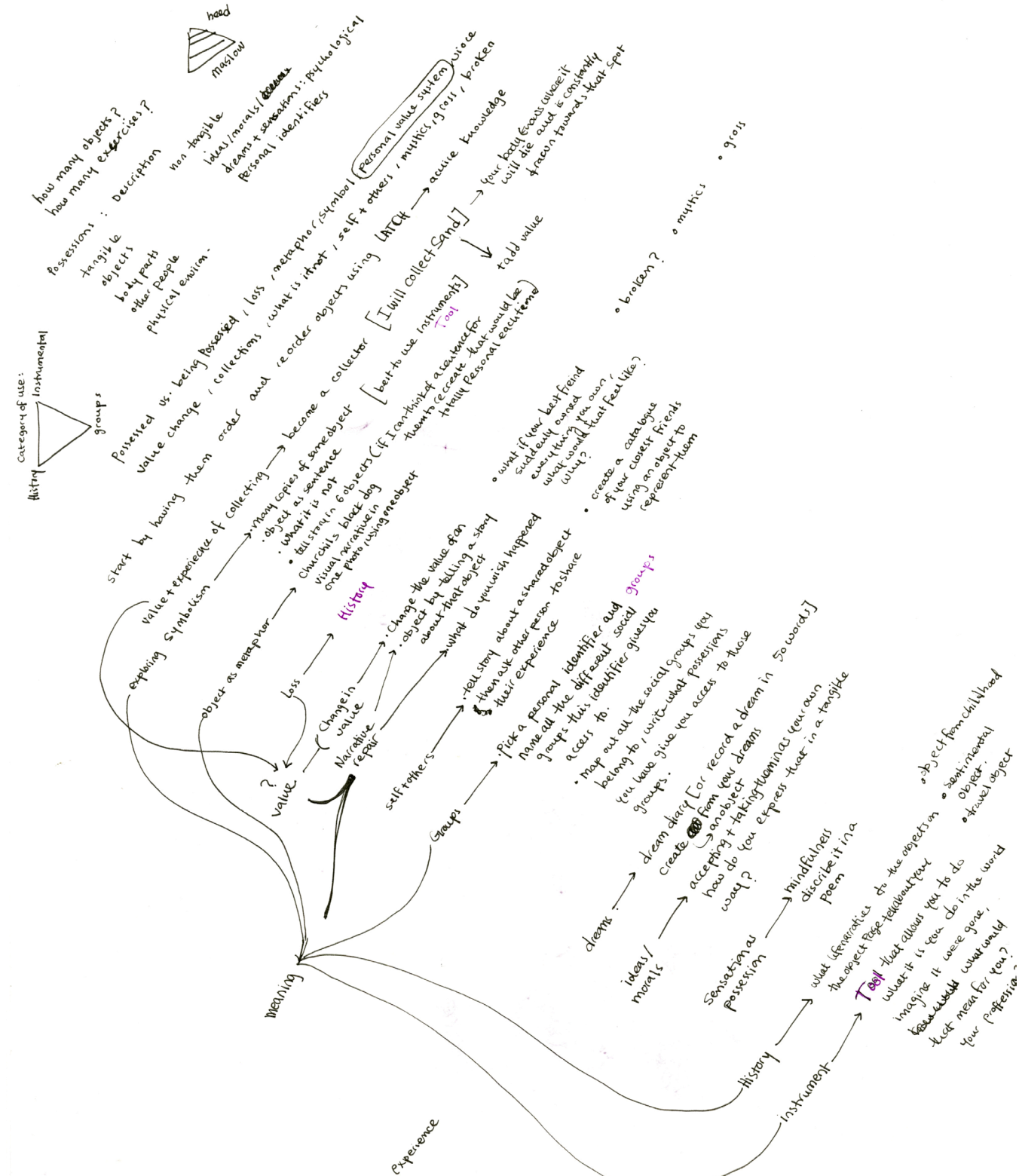
| **diagram** | breaks down the categories that possessions can fall into, their function, and the human need that drives acquiring them

| **writing** | my attempts at tying the categories, functions, and needs associated with possessions together into prompts that could transfer wisdom about self

reflexive journal At some point over the summer, between my fourth and fifth semester, I began to explore various methods of design research through the book *Universal Methods of Design*. I began to develop a research journal to give to users of my comparative platform as a means of sensitizing them to my topic, and a way for me to extract information from them about their personal possession. After a certain amount of experimenting with my own personal possessions, and through attempting to develop prompts for the users of the journal, I observed that the knowledge I gained in going through the process outlined by Wurman was crucial in creating insights into the role my possessions played with regards to my sense of self. I also realized that working through these exercises that I had created for myself was invaluable experience needed to achieve the wisdom that I had found regarding my own self in the world. Add to that the recommendations that I explained earlier from the precedent section regarding *The Living Memory Box* project, which recommended turning the process of annotation and organization into a process of self-expression, which a journal is, and it seemed logical that another process should occur before one is able to truly compare self to others in the comparative platform.

Though my initial readings into the creation of user's journals focused on the design of research journals, I managed to salvage some transferable lessons from what I read. The most relevant lesson that I took from reading into the creation of research was the method of designing the process that users would experience with the desired outcome in mind. This essentially means to step away from the process of design long enough to fully flesh out a desired lesson, and then returning to the beginning and figuring out each and every way that learning could possibly be brought about. This method resonated with me because it was the same method used at the school at which I taught for two years; it was called outcome based learning, and was highly effective in insuring that teachers could design a learning process in many different ways and yet still reach the standardized outcome²⁸.

Using the outcome based learning technique, I began to design the explorations that would go into the reflexive journal. To do this I broke down the journal into the outcomes that could be taken away from the processes of exploration and exploration. Three main categories gradually emerged: meaning/value, voice, and perspective as lessons that could be pulled from each



The Journal:

Sensitize "users" topic
provoke thinking
inspire self understanding
communicate about self
and environment

understand perception, how it differs between people: the question about object that has shared experience

Symbolic nature of possession as tool for communication: Recreating the form/function

Instrumental: ~~protection~~ satisfaction of needs + do what we do in the world

Sentimental (personal history)

Social groups:

tangible vs intangible

Loss: cue, memory

Object as tool to make complex things easy to talk about metaphor

good luck charms + talismans

National pride vs tradition

Collections: my history box? → Should be a real collection → marker pens used in writing my thesis, post cards

Something carried everyday: wallet, jewelry [object in close physical space]

Shoes (clothing, flats, my glasses)

6. Personal identifying characteristics (age, occupation...) 28, teacher, designer, Mx

5. Body parts My eyes, my hands, my curls, my heart

4. Other people Talita, Nuni, ZM, Richard

3. Physical environments My studio photo, the concave office, classroom, the room in Amsterdam

2. Abstract ideas (morals of society, the law...) → compassion, equality, feminism

1. Psychological and inorganic processes (Itchichon role, the conscience) → Sensations? my leg keeps shaking the whole time I study, I cry easily, I chirp + dreams? my dreams are a big part of my life + their interpretations. → the sea glass

Rewriting their own narrative

cue, metaphor, symbol, Instrumental + sentimental + connect to social group
Cue documentation Communication + connection, tool membership

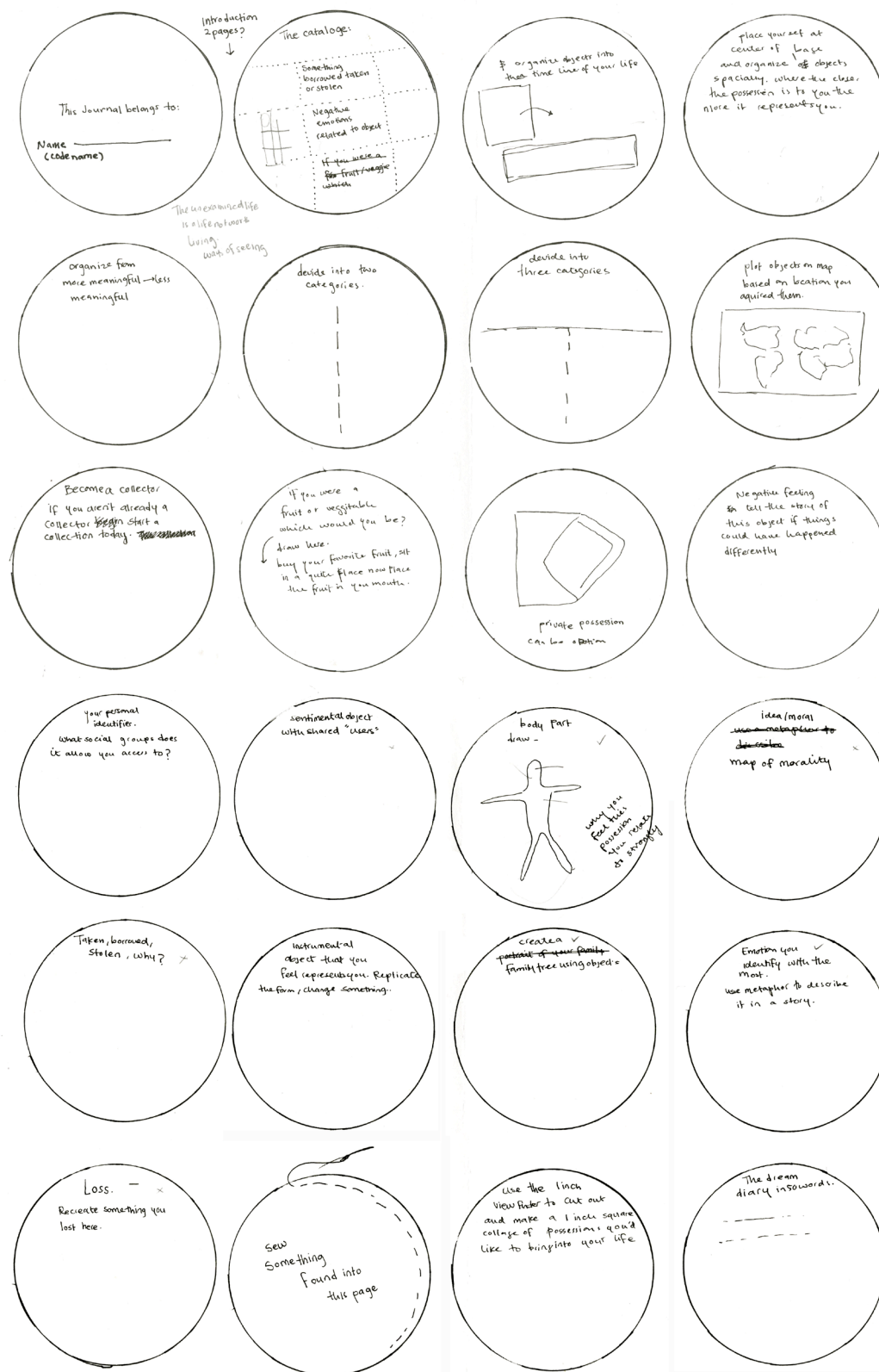
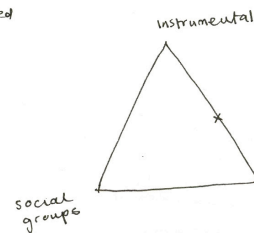
Tangible vs Intangible

objects we own
body parts
other people
physical environment

ideas/morals

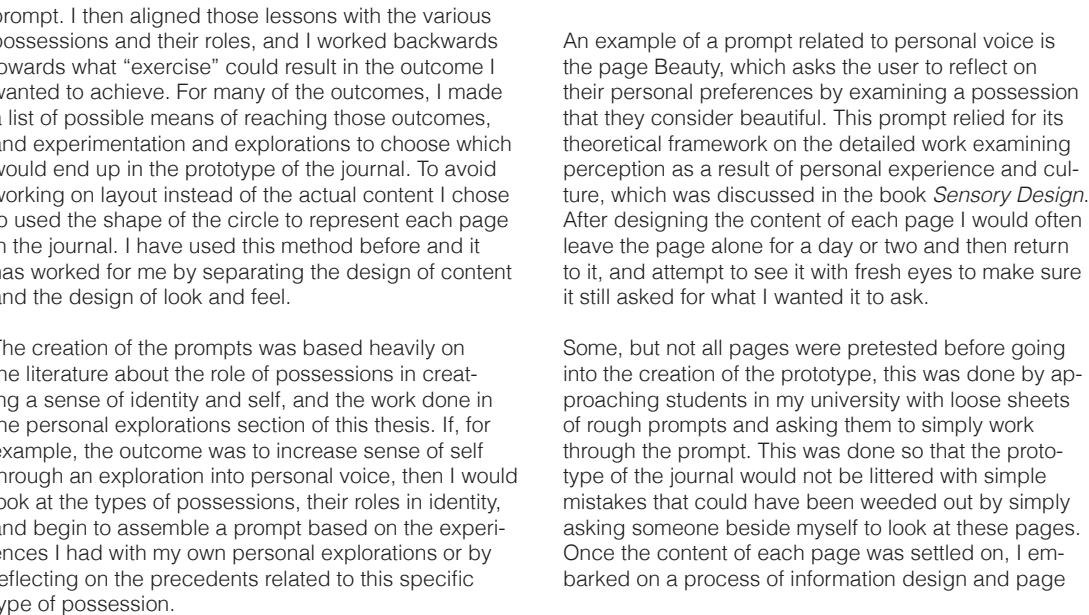
dreams
sensation: smell, sight, sound
personal identifiers
psychological inorganic process

unconscious patterns / behaviors
↳ by a crush I love [feeling]
possessed → belong to female gender + owned by grandmother
vs
possession → everything else



facing page writing
refining and simplifying the ideas from the sketches on the previous page, in an attempt of reducing the concepts to their simplest form

circle sketches
designing the content of each prompt in the reflexive journal process



prompt. I then aligned those lessons with the various possessions and their roles, and I worked backwards towards what “exercise” could result in the outcome I wanted to achieve. For many of the outcomes, I made a list of possible means of reaching those outcomes, and experimentation and explorations to choose which would end up in the prototype of the journal. To avoid working on layout instead of the actual content I chose to use the shape of the circle to represent each page in the journal. I have used this method before and it has worked for me by separating the design of content and the design of look and feel.

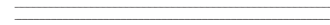
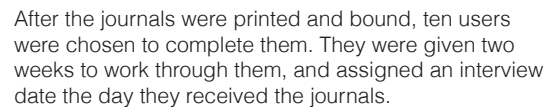
The creation of the prompts was based heavily on the literature about the role of possessions in creating a sense of identity and self, and the work done in the personal explorations section of this thesis. If, for example, the outcome was to increase sense of self through an exploration into personal voice, then I would look at the types of possessions, their roles in identity, and begin to assemble a prompt based on the experiences I had with my own personal explorations or by reflecting on the precedents related to this specific type of possession.

An example of a prompt related to personal voice is the page Beauty, which asks the user to reflect on their personal preferences by examining a possession that they consider beautiful. This prompt relied for its theoretical framework on the detailed work examining perception as a result of personal experience and culture, which was discussed in the book *Sensory Design*. After designing the content of each page I would often leave the page alone for a day or two and then return to it, and attempt to see it with fresh eyes to make sure it still asked for what I wanted it to ask.

Some, but not all pages were pretested before going into the creation of the prototype, this was done by approaching students in my university with loose sheets of rough prompts and asking them to simply work through the prompt. This was done so that the prototype of the journal would not be littered with simple mistakes that could have been weeded out by simply asking someone beside myself to look at these pages. Once the content of each page was settled on, I embarked on a process of information design and page

I table I documents the intended outcome of each method incorporated into the reflexive journal process

I table I documents the intended outcome of each method incorporated into the reflexive journal process



Our bodies are possessions that are intimately connected to us throughout our entire life. For most people these bodies are a direct representation of who they feel they are, for others these bodies are seen as mere containers of their true form, which is their soul. On this exercise you will explore ideas of the body as a symbolic representation of self, and the body as documentation of personal history.



In the space below write a poem about this emotion, and what it feels like to be possessed by this emotion. The title should be the name of the emotion, and the body of the poem should not contain this word or its synonyms.

| **spreads** | *three examples of completed spreads from the reflexive journal process*





evaluation Since this thesis exploration focuses on the design and prototyping of the reflexive journal, the evaluation also centered on this topic. However, I was able to gain insight into the desirability of the comparative platform, and the role that users felt it could play in exploring a different means of creating self-awareness through the user evaluations of the journal process.

Reflexive Journal The reflexive journal was created with the goal of allowing users to gain awareness into their self and identity through the examination of their personal possessions. The prototype of this journal was printed, bound, and distributed to 10 users in their early to mid twenties. These participants were chosen from a pool of deep thinkers and creative students who go to various schools in Education City. The evaluation of their experience and behavior was done through interview and through examination of use behavior (how they used the journal). The interviews lasted for half an hour and were divided into two sections: general experience of the journal, and questions about the three main sections of the book. The three main sections of the book were; voice, value/meaning, and perspective. Only eight of the ten users were interviewed, since two users did not meet the deadline set by the interviewer. Most users left two or three pages blank; they were instructed to feel comfortable leaving pages blank if they wanted to. The pages that were left blank generally corresponded to the pages that users found problematic.

general experience and behavior The first part of the evaluation was concerned with user's experience of answering the prompts, and comparing that experience with the behaviors that I observed through examining the journal after the interviews.

Most users felt that the journal did increase self-awareness, and those who said that it didn't create a large increase in self-awareness explained this observation by noting that they have always been interested in self-reflection. However, it is interesting to note that these same users went on to explain many discoveries they made about self through using the journal (per-

haps they aren't aware of what they actually learned).

Users felt that the overall experience of using the journal was very enjoyable, but that using the journal required a great deal of self-reflection, which at times could be difficult. Most users expressed a bit of discomfort when exploring prompts that asked them to reflect on negative life events or to disclose personal secrets. These same users, however, went on to explain that pushing through the discomfort of exploring these negative possessions allowed them to reflect on things they would normally rather avoid, and that these reflections were often very insightful.

One noteworthy interview answer with regards to the overall experience of using the journal came from the only male user to participate in this user test. The user explained that even though his mother is a psychiatrist, he has never truly believed in the idea of feeling relief and improvement from participating in self-reflection and psychological therapy. However, after using the journal and engaging privately in the act of self reflection he did, in fact, feel relieved and had an improvement in his mood. He laughed uncomfortably as he admitted that he could no longer deny that self-reflection can actually help relieve difficult emotions, his reluctance thinly veiling what may have been countless discussions with his mother about this same topic.

When asked if they could identify a moment of personal discovery brought on by using the journal, almost all user's were able to pin point a moment easily. These moments of discovery did not appear to have any discernable pattern, and were not strongly associated with any one prompt; they were closely related to each user's personal experience and histories. For example, one user explained that he felt more attached to (and believed more in) his journal after he discovered that, contrary to his belief, he was in fact a collector. Another user shared that she was shocked to discover that she was unwilling to write down her dreams in the dream journal. She explained that she had never realized how much she believes in her dreams and their affect on her life, until she refused to write them down for fear of assisting them in coming true.

| **photograph** | *documentation of the evaluative interviews that were conducted using a script and audio recorder*

| image | documentation of scripted interview, used for journal assessment

When users were asked if they'd like to see other user's journals, they all answered yes. Some added that they would only want to see the journals if they were shared by the user. The overall justification for wanting to see other's journals was to compare their experiences, feelings, thoughts, and even ways of approaching the prompts. The users seemed to be as interested in the content of their peer's answers as they were in their creative skills and how the journals actually looked. When asked about sharing their own journals, they expressed a willingness to do so, even excitement about putting themselves out there, all except one student that is who seemed quite indifferent about sharing her own work (even though she wanted to see others work).

look and feel In this section, users shared their experience about the process of using the journal and their experience of the book itself.

All users appreciated the availability of the kit: one user pointed out that having the kit allowed her to spend more time and effort thinking about the process and the ideas than trying to figure out what material to use or where to find the material. Users said that they carried the journals around with them regularly: the journals did seem weathered, which means the cover should be something durable and lightweight. I even noticed that users tried to keep things tucked into the journal while they carried them around, perhaps adding a pocket and a band to tie it shut would be wise.

When asked about their expectations of what the journal would be like to use compared to their actual experience of using the journal, users commented that the look of the cover and the title gave off this eerie sense which they found exciting, but that the content was instead mature and very complex. One user found this disconnect ironic and appealing, another felt that it could be adjusted to better match the content, and finally one user said that when she discovered that the prompts were specifically about her personal experience and life she was more frightened by that than she was when she thought it was a journal about possession.

I feel the title and graphic mark of the cover are appropriate, but that the background could be replaced to reflect something of a more mature nature. Though it is interesting to note that one student pointed out that she assumed the book would be about possession and ghosts because she remembered a former project I did about the Jinn: perhaps that was also present in the mind of other users.

When asked about their experience of using the journal, users noted that the book did not lie flat and that this was a constant problem. Some users appreciated the French fold and others did not, and almost all pointed out at various parts of the interview how much they appreciated the imagery in the journal.

section evaluation The sections were divided into what aspect of self the user was supposed to learn about by going through each process. Each section had one overall theme, this theme was reduced to one word, and the definition of that one word was explained to the user at the beginning of each section.

voice Voice was defined as the authentic voice that speaks through people, that they are constantly trying to accurately represent. In this section, the two most effective pages according to the users were The Collector and Family. In the case of The Collector, users who chose this page often explained that they had never seen themselves as collectors, but that after reading through the prompt and looking at their environments, they were able to easily spot a collection that they were unconsciously always adding to. They described the emotions related to this process as positive and enjoyable. The users often lit up as they spoke about taking most of an evening to sift through their belongings to reply to this prompt, stopping for long periods to recollect memories associated with certain possessions.

With regards to the Family page, the users who chose this page said that they had often thought of their family members and their feelings for those members, but that they had never really stopped to think about



JOURNAL ASSESSMENT:

A. EXPLAIN INTENTIONS:

THE GOAL OF THE JOURNAL WAS THE GAIN AWARENESS ABOUT SELF THROUGH AN EXAMINATION OF PERSONAL POSSESSIONS.

B. GENERAL EVALUATIONS QUESTIONS:

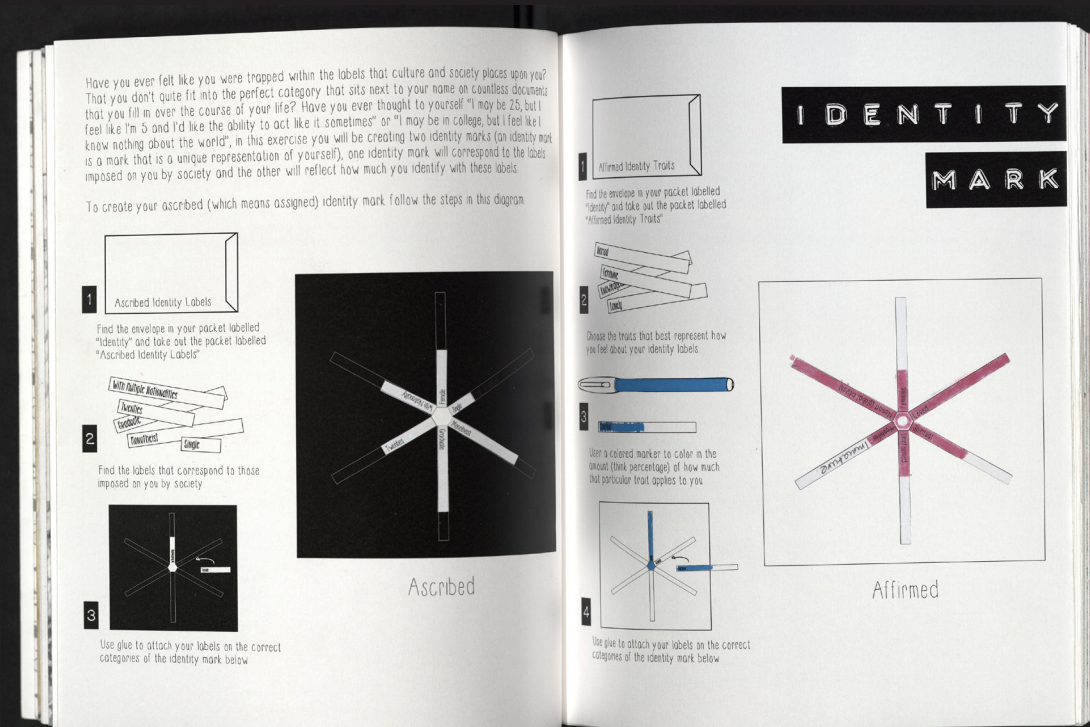
1. DO YOU FEEL THAT THE PROCESS OF GOING THROUGH THE JOURNAL HELPED YOU GAIN INSIGHT INTO YOUR SELF/IDENTITY?
2. CAN YOU TELL ME -IN GENERAL- HOW THIS JOURNAL AIDED YOU IN AN INCREASE OF SELF AWARENESS?
3. WHAT WAS YOUR OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF GOING THROUGH THE JOURNAL? (ENJOYABLE, BORING, COMPLICATED..).
4. CAN YOU DESCRIBE A MOMENT IN WHICH GOING THROUGH THE PROCESS OF THIS JOURNAL CAUSED YOU TO SEE YOURSELF DIFFERENTLY?
5. DID YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF USING THIS JOURNAL MATCH YOUR ACTUAL EXPERIENCE OF THE JOURNAL?
6. CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PROCESS OF USING THE JOURNAL?
7. HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE KIT? WAS IT HELPFUL, DID YOU USE IT?
8. WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN SEEING WHAT OTHERS DID WITH THEIR JOURNALS?
9. WOULD YOU SHARE YOUR PAGES WITH OTHERS ON A WEB BASED PLATFORM IF IT WERE AVAILABLE?

C. EXPLAIN SECTIONS OF THE JOURNAL (PERSPECTIVE, VOICE, MEANING/VALUE).

D. ASK USER TO PICK OUT OF EACH GROUPING OF SPREADS WHICH PROCESS BEST MET THE GOAL OF EACH SECTION.

E. EVALUATION QUESTIONS FOR EACH SECTION:

1. WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF BY USING THIS PAGE?
2. WHAT WAS YOUR OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF GOING THOUGHT THIS PAGE? ANY PREVALENT EMOTIONS?
3. OUT OF THE REMAINING SPREADS, WHICH WOULD YOU SAY WAS THE MOST PROBLEMATIC? EXPLAIN?



the ties that connected them. Users liked the task of presenting a possession that connected them to their family members. One user pointed out that she had an overall negative perception of her family and their influence on her life, but that by going through the task of connecting herself to them she was able to find common ground, and she seemed very pleased by this discovery.

The page that was the most problematic for users in this section was Replication. Users said that they weren't sure what they were doing or why they were doing it. In fact most users did not return a clay object with their journals, its not clear if they actually attempted and failed to create an object, or if they just chose not to do the page because of their confusion. One comment about this page, and the Reincarnation page, was that these two pages felt more like an arts and crafts exercise than explorations of self through possessions.

perspective The section on perspective was defined as exploring, sharing, altering perspective, and in so doing creating a new perspective. Users were asked which page best achieved the goals of this section; which was to gain an awareness of how perspective plays out in relations to identity and self. The two pages that seemed to do this the best were the Identity Mark page, and the sorting pages at the beginning of the book. Identity Mark was the most popular page in this section; ironically, it was also the most problematic. Users who chose this page said that it allowed them to see how they really felt about labels that have always been attached to them. For example, one student said that she knew she was 22 but that she felt 5 years old. The page seemed to allow them the comfort of not feeling like these labels defined them. As an evaluator, I found it very interesting when I discovered two users who had the same Ascribed Identity marks, and radically different Affirmed Identity marks. Users found this page problematic because the labels were extremely small, often got stuck in the spine, and sometimes would pop off the page after the glue dried.

The second most popular page was from the sorting pages; specifically people chose the categorization pages. What users had to say about this page was that it allowed them to see how they organized their possessions, and the way in which they organized them shocked them because it revealed things that they hadn't expected. One student pointed out that simply sorting her possessions by how often she used them allowed her to see that certain things she thought she used often and valued a great deal weren't actually being used that often at all. It made her think about why she did that, and what it meant. She also explained that this made her want to change her behavior and use the things she values the most more often.

meaning and value The third section was titled Meaning and Value, and was about the morals, ethics, and values that drive and motivate. Users were asked to point out which page best helped them gain an understanding about meaning and values embedded in their possessions. The most popular pages were the Mantra page, and the Love Letter page. Users who chose the Mantra page explained that it made them think about the values that shape their life and the values they want in their life in the future. Some mantras were an affirmation of the values they identified inside themselves that they liked, others were means of bringing better values into their lives. This page was also seen very positively because it was seen as forward driven and provided users a chance to consider what the future might hold for them.

The Love Letter page was described as shocking. One user said that she had always felt like she had no place to herself, but that as she was reflecting on the page and what she could write, she realized she was sitting in "her space". Another student explained that this page made her stop and look at the place she lived in, in a way that she had never done before, a way that she wishes she had learned earlier. She said that being able to actually see the room instead of just be in the room allowed her to appreciate what she had, and that that made her feel blessed and grateful because she may have what others lack in their life.

| scans | documentation of used journal pages.

| **scans** | documentation of used journal pages

also continues on the next spread

The page in this section that was most problematic was the Morality page. This page requires users to plot their moral landscape onto a 2D topographic map that has been provided for them. Though the page has an explanation of what a topographic map is and how it could be used in this exercise, users found the map completely confusing. Users said they understood the idea of laying their positive and negative traits in the form of highs and lows on a map, and that they were actually interested in the concept of the prompt, but that they couldn't read a topographic map or make sense of its lines. Users suggested that a simpler map be provided, or no map at all.

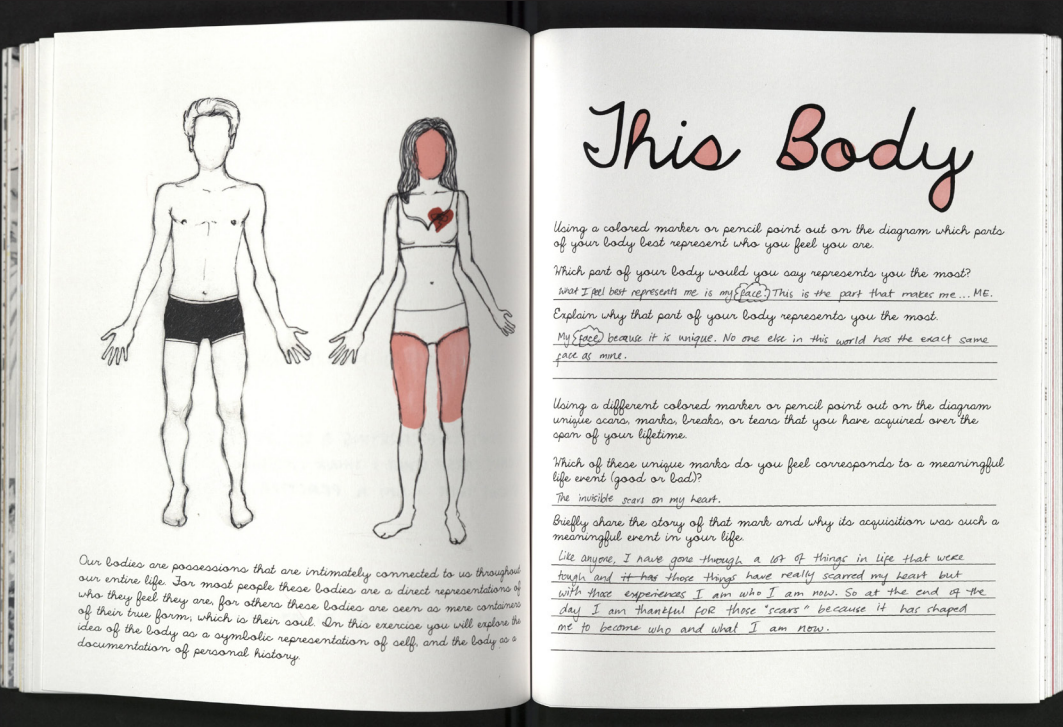
comparative platform Some feedback about the desirability of the proposed platform was acquired during the interviews conducted to evaluate the reflexive journal. Users were asked at the end of the interview if they were interested in seeing the results of other user's journals, and all users answered yes. Some users made sure to add that they would only like to see other user's journals if these journals were shared willingly. When asked why they would be interested in seeing the work of others, one user replied that she'd like to compare herself to others by seeing how they worked through each process. She also noted that, had she seen the journals without participating in them, she may not have been interested in the content, but after having gone through the process herself she was very curious about seeing what others had experienced. This confirms that the journal itself is a means by which users can be drawn to the comparative platform. When asked about sharing their own pages, all users indicated that they would share some, but not all, of their journals. Some users then added that they would consider sharing the entire journal if they didn't have to use their real name and could remain anonymous.

Serendipitously, during one of the interviews, a user decided to explain the significance of her watch to me. As she sat there rubbing her watch between her fingers, she pointed out to me that she had worn the watch regularly since 7th grade (which made it about 12 years old). She continued to share with me that her father gave it to her, and that even though she has many watches, this particular watch meant the world to her. As she told me her story I couldn't help but smile since I was sitting

there holding my own 13-year-old watch in my hands, one that my father gave to me, one of many watches that I own, but one which could never be replaced. The similarity of our stories gave me a chill; she is a few years younger than me, yet we received our watches at around the same time, and both as a symbol of achievement and love from our fathers. I mention this story here because it was the basis from which the platform design began. Though this girl and I were worlds apart, and we may never have met in our entire life, we shared a very similar experience in the world and we were able to resonate through the sharing of our personal possessions and the stories attached to these possessions.

Another major function of the comparative platform is to allow for the sorting and resorting of submissions. Though not directly speaking about the comparative platform, users indicated how being able to sort and resort their possessions in the first half of the book allowed them to see new things about themselves that they had never expected to see. This supports that the sorting and resorting mechanism would, in fact, allow for users to experience possessions uploaded to the page in many different ways, and in so doing allows them to gain different perspectives on the concept of self in relation to others.

It is clear to me that the comparative platform could serve an important role in allowing users a glimpse into their own personal identity, one that is not possible through the reflexive process of the journal. This would be done through several key functions of the proposed platform, the first of which is the ability to see things being added to the page in real time, which allows users to actually witness the continuous shift or flux in identity as the environment it exists in changes. Another major function would be to provide many different perspectives on self through providing many different perspectives on its representative data set (possessions), this is done through the various methods of data sorting. Finally, the website could offer users the ability to begin to generate their own prompts, by choosing themselves which possessions to share and what stories/makings they would like to create in response to those possessions.



SYMBOLIC GESTURES

The design of a stamp is a complex and detailed process that attempts to condense the essence of a certain topic into a tiny symbolic gesture. This requires the designer to become fully aware of the topic examined and to determine which graphical elements can best represent this topic.

For this exercise you will create four postage stamps that will represent different periods of your personal history. The key is to represent these periods using your personal possessions (tangible/intangible) owned during those periods.

Use any technique or medium that you like to create your stamps. Just remember that every stamp has three elements: a numerical value for postage paid, text that indicates the origin of the stamp (usually name of country), and an image.

How will you decide on the value of your postage? Do all the periods in your personal narrative have the same value? Meaning? Where will your stamps originate from? The location that defined that period in your life? The overall emotional landscape that defined it?

Note: there are thicker stamps included in your kit if you'd like paint your stamps and then attach them here.



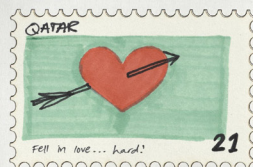
CHILDHOOD



PRETEEN



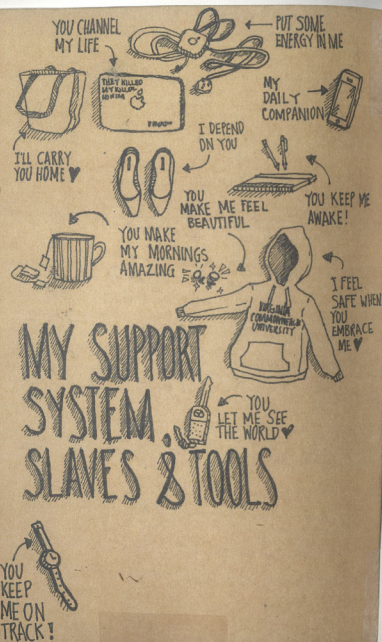
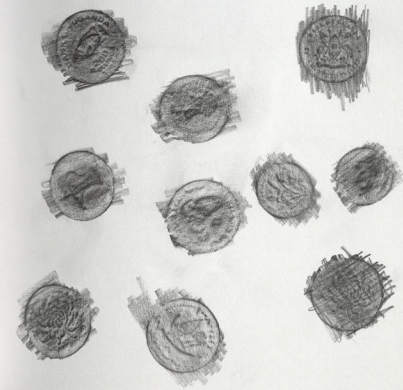
TEENAGER



EARLY TWENTIES

The Collector

Throughout the course of history man has collected all sorts of things from stamps to hotel "do not disturb" tags. Each collection is completely unique, not only because of its content, but because of its author. If you are a collector, document your collection below (draw, photograph, glue in). If you are not a collector begin a collection and document your progress on this page (draw, photograph, glue in).



BAGGAGE



DOCUMENT THE CONTENT OF YOUR BAG OR PURSE ON THE FACING PAGE (PHOTO, DRAWING, PHOTOCOPY). AFTERWARDS USE A COLORED MARKER TO LABEL THE CONTENTS OF YOUR BAG OR PURSE. THEN TAKE A MOMENT TO CONSIDER THE ITEMS IN YOUR BAG AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT ITS CONTENTS.

DO YOU REALLY NEED ALL THE OBJECTS YOU ARE CARRYING AROUND WITH YOU IN THIS CONTAINER?

NOT AS MUCH.

WHAT DOES YOUR ANSWER SAY ABOUT YOU? ARE YOU A PERSON WHO IS ALWAYS PREPARED? OR JUST FORGETFUL?

I ALWAYS WANT TO BE PREPARED.

IN A SIMILAR WAY TO THE LAST TWO QUESTIONS, DESCRIBE YOUR PERSONALITY USING THE CONTENTS OF YOUR BAG AS A CUE. (PROOF: I'M CLEARLY A NEAT FREAK BECAUSE EVERY OBJECT I CARRY HAS ITS OWN POCKET...)

WELL, I AM A NEAT FREAK. I WANT EVERYTHING ORGANIZED.

I ALWAYS WANT TO BE PREPARED IN CASE OF "WHAT IF" SITUATIONS.

ARE THERE ANY OBJECTS IN YOUR BAG THAT HAVE NO FUNCTIONAL PURPOSE (THEY ARE SIMPLY SENTIMENTAL OR LUCKY)?

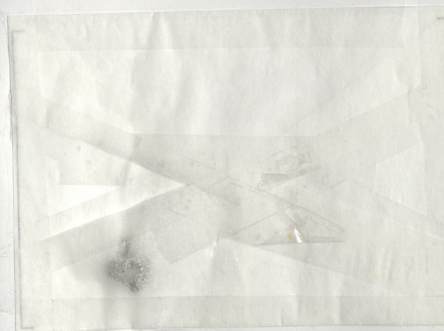
IF SO, WHY DO YOU CARRY THEM WITH YOU?

NONE. THEY ARE ALL PRACTICAL OBJECTS.

PRIVATE

We all have at least one possession, tangible (objects, people, etc.) or intangible (dreams, morals, etc.), that we choose not to share with others around us. The reasons we choose to keep these possessions private says a great deal about our personal values and experience. For example some choose to keep something private because these possessions reflect personal values that differ from those around them, and they have experienced being judged, or rejected by others because of these personal values.

On a sheet of paper describe a possession that you choose to keep private. Explain this choice. Then place the paper into the envelope attached here. Seal it if you want to continue to keep it private, or leave it open if you are ready to share your possession.





future directions This reflexive journal process was tested on nine women and one man. Further efforts would be to test the journal on a larger group of men, in order to test its appeal to both genders and to compare the and contrast between the two groups in relation to preference and dislikes.

The journal was created with the idea that teenagers could/would be interested in using this process. Some users pointed out that the language was very academic and could be made more accessible and poetic. One user actually completed her journal with her 15-year-old sister, and the sister was so pleased with the journal that she said she would like to purchase one for her best friend. A future direction would either be to work on making the journal a little more accessible to a younger audience, or to make the journal more mature and less targeted to younger adults. I am unsure of the feasibility of this direction because I believe the many of the insights created from using this journal were achieved through use of its narrative set up, and that making the journal more accessible to younger adults might lessen the overall impact and hinder it achieving its goal.

Though this was not included in the prototype, the end of the journal would include a prompt asking users if they would like to share their work with others by going to the URL of the comparative platform. The page would briefly explain the different kind of learning one could gain about self through this comparative process. Both the journal and the platform were designed to work independently of each other, because some users do not like the idea of deep self reflection and would not appreciate the journal, while others who may enjoy self-reflection have no desire to share their most private thoughts with the outside world. In the end, it was necessary to create both methods, because without both methods a person is only experiencing one side of self and identity. This is because identity is formed between people, and within self, it is both together, and not one or the other.

The most significant area to extend this inquiry to facilitate awareness and insight into self is to create a

functioning prototype of the web comparative platform so as to gain valuable user insight into its ability to perform its stated function. This future investigation could involve refinements of the journal process that would then be presented it to users with the platform. To allow them to assess how well the two methods work together, to evaluate the impact of having both methods.

conclusion The investigations in this thesis focused on designing a platform for facilitating individual reflection on self through interactions with personal possessions. The research into identity indicated a need for two very different and very detailed methods for examining self: one through personal reflection, and one through comparison. This led to the design of a reflexive journaling process and the proposal of comparative platform. The processes in both methods were designed using theories put forth by Nathan Shedroff on transferring wisdom, and played out in the form of stimulating users to tell stories about their lives through the evaluation and contemplations of their own personal possessions. Evaluations of the reflexive journal indicated that there was an increased awareness about self and identity through the use of this journal, and that this increase in awareness led to a sense of relief and inner peace. The evaluative interviews exposed many stories of discovery about self through the use of the journal. These interviews also pointed positively to the need and desirability of the proposed comparative platform.

In the end, the user testing and evaluation has proven that a reflexive process involving personal possessions can be designed, through which insights about self can be facilitated, using a process of reflection about personal possessions. Furthermore, this inquiry has revealed that a process of self reflection can result in a positive impact on a person's emotional health and wellbeing.

end notes

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⁷ Malnar, Joy Monice, and Frank Vodvarka. "Objects of Our Lives." In *Sensory Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. 181).

⁸ Dittmar, Helga. "Are You What You Have?." *The Psychologist*, April 2004.

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¹⁰ Malnar et al., "Objects of Our Lives," 196.

¹¹ Mary Douglas, and Baron C. Isherwood. *The World of Goods* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

¹² Ioana Bursan, "Collecting Memories: An Anthropological Approach to Objects as Souvenirs ." *The Scientific Journal of Humanistics Studies* 3, no. 4 (2011): 11.

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¹⁷ IBID., 43

¹⁸ Stevens, Molly M., Gregory D. Abowd, Khai N. Truong, and Florian Vollmer. "Getting Into The Living Memory Box: Family Archives & Holistic Design." *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing* 7, no. 3-4 (2003): 210-216.

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²⁰ IBID., 215.

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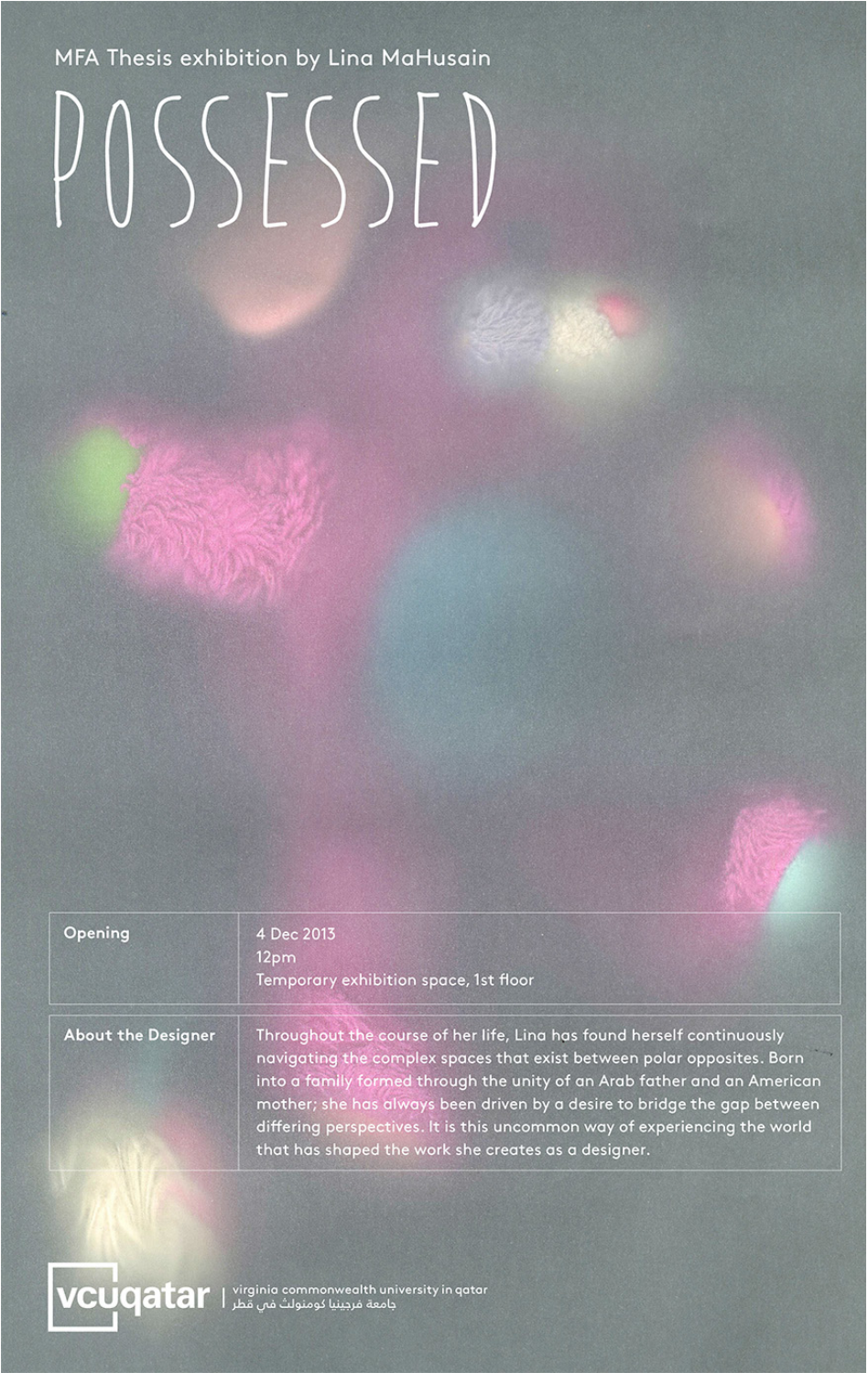
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appendix a This section documents the final thesis exhibition, that was held in VCU Qatar on the 4th of December, 2014, at noon.

| **image** | *exhibition e-vite*



Opening	4 Dec 2013 12pm Temporary exhibition space, 1st floor
About the Designer	Throughout the course of her life, Lina has found herself continuously navigating the complex spaces that exist between polar opposites. Born into a family formed through the unity of an Arab father and an American mother; she has always been driven by a desire to bridge the gap between differing perspectives. It is this uncommon way of experiencing the world that has shaped the work she creates as a designer.

| **top photograph** | aerial view of exhibition space

| **photograph below** | entrance to exhibition space, with poetic prelude to orient approaching visitors



| **top photograph** | images of process work next to ipod presenting audio clips of assessment interviews

| **photograph below** | space created for visitors to sit and explore journal prototype at length



| **photograph** | visitor interacting with enlarged journal spreads



| **photograph** | completed
wild geese exploration,
which also contained audio
of author reading the poem

| **top photograph** | *detail of metaphor exploration*

| **photograph below** | *dream exploration*



| **photograph** | *narrative exploration*



appendix b This section documents all the pages and prompts that were created for the reflexive journaling process. The pages are in the same order as they appear in the book.





THE POSSESSIONS THAT SURROUND INDIVIDUALS, SUCH AS CLOTHING OR HOME FURNISHINGS, ARE CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF THE FRONTS PRESENTED TO AN AUDIENCE AND ARE INTEGRAL PARTS OF PERFORMANCES. BY MANIPULATING THE POSSESSIONS AROUND THEM, PERFORMERS EXERT CONTROL OVER THE INFORMATION AUDIENCES RECEIVE.

BURROUGHS, DREWS, AND HALPMAN

TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE THINGS THEY CREATE CONSTITUTES A CENTRAL ASPECT OF THE HUMAN CONDITION. PAST MEMORIES, PRESENT EXPERIENCES, AND FUTURE DREAMS OF EACH PERSON IS INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO THE OBJECTS THAT COMPOSE HIS OR HER ENVIRONMENT.

CSKISZENTHALYI

THE EXERCISES IN THIS JOURNAL WERE CREATED WITH ONE GOAL IN MIND: TO INCREASE PERSONAL AWARENESS ABOUT SELF THROUGH THE EXAMINATION OF ONE'S POSSESSIONS. ALL THE EXERCISES IN THIS JOURNAL WILL REVOLVE AROUND ONE OF TWO TYPES OF POSSESSIONS, TANGIBLE POSSESSIONS, OR INTANGIBLE POSSESSIONS. MOST PEOPLE THINK OF OBJECTS WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR POSSESSIONS, BUT IN REALITY POSSESSIONS COVER A WIDE SPECTRUM OF THINGS. EXAMPLES OF TANGIBLE POSSESSIONS ARE: A PERSON'S BODY PARTS, THE OBJECTS THEY OWN, ENVIRONMENTS THEY INHABIT OR USE OFTEN, AND EVEN OTHER PEOPLE. EXAMPLES OF INTANGIBLE POSSESSIONS ON THE OTHER HAND ARE: DREAMS, MORALS, IDEAS, AND PHYSICAL SENSATIONS. IN EACH EXERCISE THE TYPE OF POSSESSION WILL BE CLEARLY STATED AND THE EXPLORATION PROCESS EXPLAINED.

WHILE POSSESSIONS MAY FIT NICELY INTO THE TWO CATEGORIES OF TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE, THE ROLES THEY PLAY IN A PERSON'S LIFE, SPECIFICALLY IN RELATION TO SELF, IS QUITE DIVERSE. THE MAIN ROLES ARE AS FOLLOWS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY THROUGH SYMBOLS AND THE INSTRUMENTS THAT DEFINES SELF, COMMUNICATION AND CONNECTION WITH AND TO SOCIAL GROUPS, AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF PERSONAL HISTORY. BY RUNNING THROUGH THE EXERCISES ONE IS ABLE TO ACQUIRE A GENERAL SENSE OF THESE ROLES AND THE WAYS IN WHICH AN EXAMINATION OF THESE ROLES CAN LEAD TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF PERSONAL VALUE SYSTEMS, PERSONAL VOICE, AND IDENTITY.

EACH VANTAGE POINT, EACH MODE OF ORGANIZATION WILL CREATE A NEW STRUCTURE. AND EACH NEW STRUCTURE WILL ENABLE YOU TO SEE A DIFFERENT MEANING, ACTING AS A NEW METHOD OF CLASSIFICATION FROM WHICH THE WHOLE CAN BE GRASPED AND UNDERSTOOD.

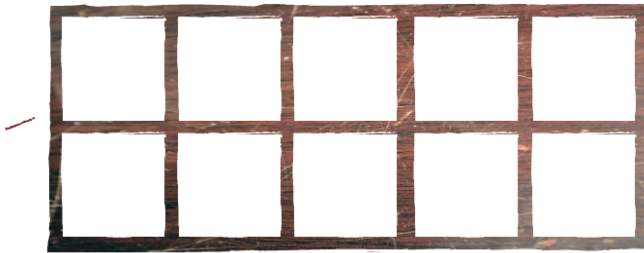
RICHARD WORMAN

FOR A MOMENT, LET'S PRETEND THAT POSSESSIONS ARE ACTUALLY LITTLE PACKETS OF DATA AND THAT THESE LITTLE PACKETS OF DATA CAN SPEAK ABOUT THE PERSONAL MEANINGS, VALUES, AND BELIEFS OF THE PERSON WHO POSSESSES THEM. IF SORTING INFORMATION IN DIFFERENT WAYS COULD PRODUCE INSIGHT, OR DIFFERENT VANTAGE POINTS (AS MENTIONED ABOVE) ABOUT A TOPIC AS A WHOLE, THEN WOULDN'T SORTING AND ORGANIZING POSSESSIONS PRODUCE INSIGHT AND AWARENESS INTO THE "SELF" OF THEIR OWNER? WELL, THAT IS WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO TEST OUT FOR YOURSELF...

IN THE FACING PAGE YOU WILL ASSEMBLE A SHORT AND SPECIFIC LIST OF YOUR POSSESSIONS BY DRAWING THEM INTO THE LITTLE BOXES PROVIDED. ONCE YOU'VE ASSEMBLED THE LIST YOU WILL PHOTOCOPY THE FACING PAGE SIX TIMES (THEN CUT THE BOXES OUT). OVER THE NEXT SIX PAGE YOU WILL BE GUIDED HOW TO SORT AND ORGANIZE THESE POSSESSIONS TO ALLOW YOU THE ABILITY TO SEE THESE FAMILIAR POSSESSIONS IN A NEW LIGHT, AND IN DOING SO ALLOW YOU TO SEE YOUR-SELF A NEW.

AFTER THOSE FIRST SIX EXERCISES YOU WILL BE ABLE TO EXPLORE YOUR SENSE OF SELF THROUGH A VARIETY OF EXERCISES THAT WILL NOT REQUIRE THIS INITIAL LIST OF POSSESSIONS (THOUGH YOU MAY CHOOSE TO EXPLORE POSSESSIONS FROM THIS LIST IN OTHER EXERCISES IF YOU'D LIKE). THESE NEW EXERCISES WILL ATTEMPT TO TEASE OUT YOUR TRUE VOICE, YOUR VALUES, AND YOUR BELIEF SYSTEMS, SO BE OPEN, HONEST, AND EXPERIMENTAL.

DRAW YOUR POSSESSIONS INTO THE LITTLE BOXES HERE, THEN PHOTOCOPY THIS PAGE SIX TIMES.



YOUR AREA

TODAY

TIMELINE: USE THIS COLORED LINE TO ORGANIZE YOUR POSSESSIONS IN ORDER OF WHEN THEY CAME INTO YOUR LIFE.

LOCATION: USE A COLORED MARKER TO DRAW LINES BETWEEN EACH POSSESSION IN YOUR TIMELINE AND THE LOCATION ON THE MAP WHERE YOU TOOK POSSESSION OF THEM



SORT YOUR POSSESSIONS INTO TWO CATEGORIES. BE SURE TO LABEL YOUR CATEGORIES.

SORT YOUR POSSESSIONS INTO THREE CATEGORIES. BE SURE TO LABEL YOUR CATEGORIES.

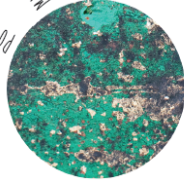
SORT YOUR POSSESSIONS INTO FOUR CATEGORIES. BE SURE TO LABEL YOUR CATEGORIES.



IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE THIS PINK DOT

AROUND THIS DOT BASED ON HOW MEANINGFUL THESE POSSESSIONS ARE TO YOU. THE

NOW ORGANIZE THE POSSESSIONS FROM YOUR POSSESSION LIST SPATIALLY
FARTHER AN OBJECT IS FROM THE DOT, THE LESS MEANINGFUL IT IS TO YOU. THE



NOW YOU'RE THE GREEN DOT. THIS TIME ORGANIZE THE
POSSESSIONS FROM YOUR POSSESSIONS LIST SPATIALLY BASED ON HOW

MUCH THEY REPRESENT YOUR IDENTITY IN THE WORLD. REMEMBER THE

NEARER THEY ARE TO YOU THE MORE THEY REPRESENT YOU.

Have you ever felt like you were trapped within the labels that culture and society places upon you? That you don't quite fit into the perfect category that sits next to your name on countless documents that you fill in over the course of your life? Have you ever thought to yourself "I may be 25, but I feel like I'm 5 and I'd like the ability to act like it sometimes" or "I may be in college, but I feel like I know nothing about the world", in this exercise you will be creating two identity marks (an identity mark is a mark that is a unique representation of yourself), one identity mark will correspond to the labels imposed on you by society and the other will reflect how much you identify with these labels.

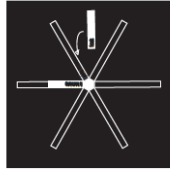
To create your ascribed (which means assigned) identity mark follow the steps in this diagram.



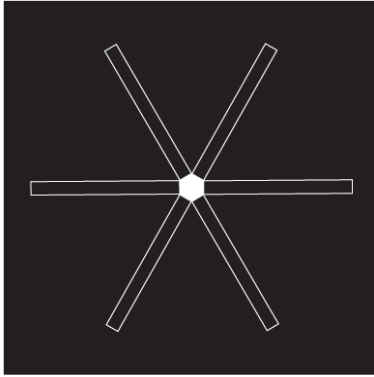
Find the envelope in your pocket labelled "Identity" and take out the pocket labelled "Ascribed Identity Labels"



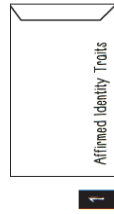
Find the labels that correspond to those imposed on you by society



Use glue to attach your labels on the correct categories of the identity mark below



Ascribed



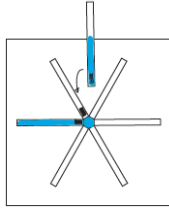
Find the envelope in your pocket labelled "Identity" and take out the pocket labelled "Affirmed Identity Traits"



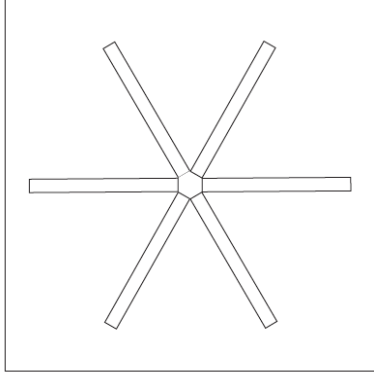
Choose the traits that you feel best represent how you feel about your identity labels



Use a colored marker to color in the amount (think percentage) of how much that particular trait applies to you



Use glue to attach your labels on the correct categories of the identity mark below



Affirmed

I D E N T I T Y

M A R K



The Collector

Throughout the course of history man has collected all sorts of things from stamps to hotel “do not disturb” tags. Each collection is completely unique, not only because of its content, but because of its author. If you are a collector, document your collection below (draw, photograph, glue in). If you are not a collector begin a collection and document your progress on this page (draw, photograph, glue in).



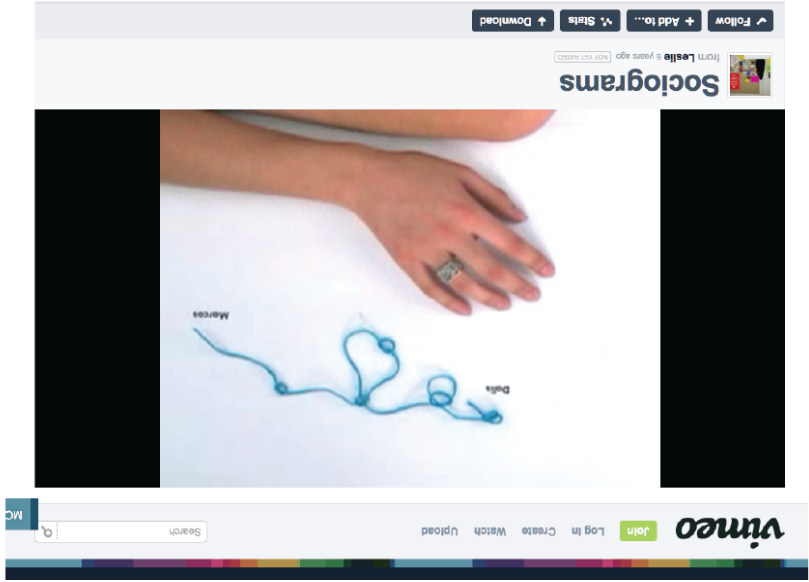
DREAM JOURNAL

Time: _____
Date: _____

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE DREAM?

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE DREAM MEANT? HOW DO YOU INTERPRET IT?

WHAT EMOTIONS WERE MOST PREVALENT DURING THE DREAM? WHY?



Shaping the space between us

Sociograms are representations of the social connections that a person has. The designer in this video asked volunteers to represent connections between themselves and one other person. In this exercise you will use string to represent the connection between you and your best friend. You can use the string provided, or any other string that you may feel best illustrates your relationship. In this exercise things like color, texture, and thickness of the string all carry great meaning, so be very deliberate in the way you choose and construct your Sociogram. Do not forget to consider time and space also. How can you represent the length of your relationship? The distance between both of you? Emotionally vs. physically?

When you are done attach your creation to this page.

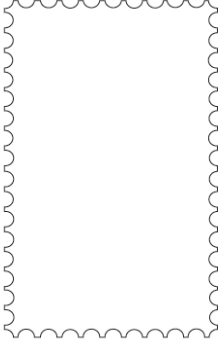
SYMBOLIC GESTURES

The design of a stamp is a complex and detailed process that attempts to condense the essence of a certain topic into a tiny symbolic gesture. This requires the designer to become fully aware of the topic examined and to determine which graphical elements can best represent this topic.

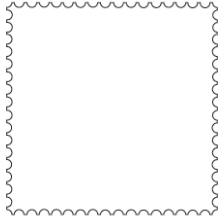
For this exercise you will create four postage stamps that will represent different periods of your personal history. The key is to represent these periods using your personal possessions (tangible/intangible) during those periods.

Use any technique or medium that you like to create your stamps, just remember that every stamp has three elements: a numerical value for postage paid, text that indicates the origin of the stamp (usually name of country), and an image.

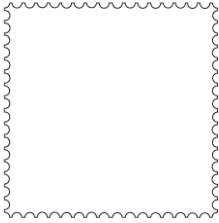
How will you decide on the value of your postage? Do all the periods in your personal narrative have the same value? Meaning? Where will your stamps originate from? The location that defined that period in your life? The overall emotional landscape that defined it?



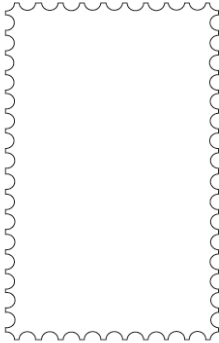
CHILDHOOD



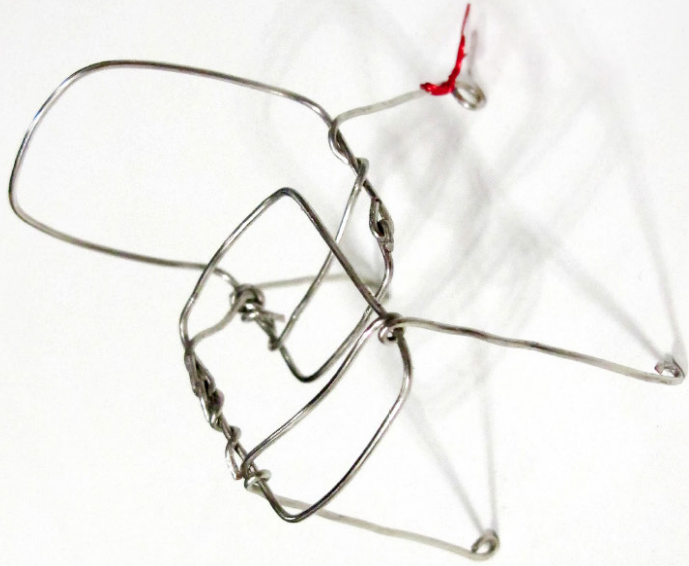
TEENAGER



PRETEEN



EARLY TWENTIES



REINCARNATION

Reincarnation is a process of recreation in which the essence or meaning of a thing is maintained. In this exercise you are asked to recreate an object of personal sentiment using the wire provided in your kit. Remember it is more important to maintain the value and meaning imbedded in the object than it is to recreate its shape.

As you recreate the possession consider which aspects of this possession truly contain its meaning and value:

- Does this object represent you?
- Are you connected to other people through this object?
- Are there any emotions tied to this object?
- Does this object help you understand who you are in this world?

“YOUR ABSENCE HAS GONE THROUGH ME
LIKE THREAD THROUGH A NEEDLE.

everything i do IS STITCHED WITH ITS COLOR.

SEPARATION - BY W. S. MERWIN



SHARE THE STORY OF A LOST POSSESSION

REMEMBER THAT POSSESSIONS CAN BE BOTH TANGIBLE LIKE PEOPLE, PLACES, AND OBJECTS, OR INTANGIBLE LIKE A SONG, A THOUGHT, OR A DREAM.

WHAT HAVE YOU LOST? _____ WHEN DID YOU LOSE IT? _____
HOW DID YOU LOSE IT? _____

WHAT DOES LOSS FEEL LIKE? _____

DRAW LOSS



BAGGAGE

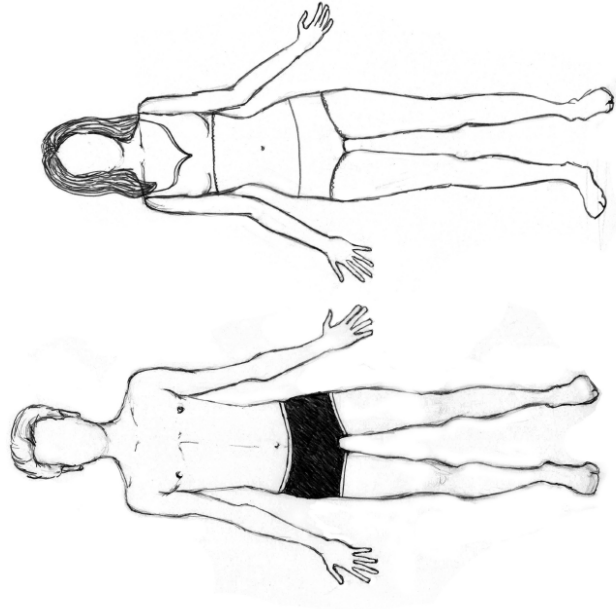
DOCUMENT THE CONTENT OF YOUR BAG OR PURSE ON THE FACING PAGE (IMAGE, DRAWING, PHOTOGRAPH). AFTERWARDS USE A COLORED MARKER TO LABEL THE CONTENTS OF YOUR BAG OR PURSE. THEN CONSIDER THE ITEMS IN YOUR BAG FOR A MOMENT AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT ITS CONTENTS.

DO YOU REALLY NEED ALL THE OBJECTS YOU ARE CARRYING AROUND WITH YOU IN THIS CONTAINER?

WHAT DOES THIS TELL YOU ABOUT YOURSELF? ARE YOU A PERSON WHO IS ALWAYS PREPARED? ARE YOU JUST FORGETFUL?

IN A SIMILAR WAY TO THE LAST TWO QUESTIONS, DESCRIBE YOUR PERSONALITY USING THE CONTENTS OF YOUR BAG AS A CLUE/PROOF (I.E. CLEARLY I AM A NEAT FREAK BECAUSE EVERY OBJECT I CARRY HAS ITS OWN POCKET...).

ARE THERE ANY OBJECTS IN YOUR BAG THAT HAVE NO FUNCTIONAL PURPOSE (THEY ARE SIMPLY SENTIMENTAL OR LUCKY)? IF SO, WHY DO YOU KEEP THEM WITH YOU?



Our bodies are possessions that are intimately connected to us throughout our entire life. For most people these bodies are a direct representation of who they feel they are. For others these bodies are seen as mere containers of their true form, which is their soul. In this exercise you will explore the idea of the body as a symbolic representation of self, and the body as a documentation of personal history.

This Body

Using a colored marker or pencil point out on the diagram which parts of your body best represent who you feel you are.

Which part of your body would you say represents you the most?

Explain why that part of your body represents you the most.

Using a different colored marker or pencil point out on the diagram unique scars, marks, breaks, or tears that you have acquired over the span of your lifetime.

Which of these unique marks do you feel corresponds to a meaningful life event (good or bad)?

Briefly share the story of that mark and why its acquisition was such a meaningful event in your life.

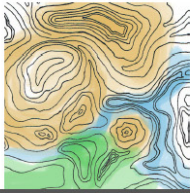


METAPHOR

It is often the case that we do not possess our emotions but that they in fact possess us. At least that is how it feels sometimes, especially with negative emotions. A trick commonly used in psychotherapy is to speak of difficult emotions in terms of a metaphor. This allows the "possessed" person to speak of the emotion from a safe and removed space. A common metaphor for the dark emotions associated with depression is the image of a black dog.

For this exercise, think of an emotion (good or bad) that you feel can overtake you with ease. Now try to picture this emotion in your mind, what color is it? Is it heavy? If it could move would it be quick and jittery, or slow and sluggish? Now think of a tangible object (objects can be both animate or inanimate) that can stand in as a metaphor for this feeling.

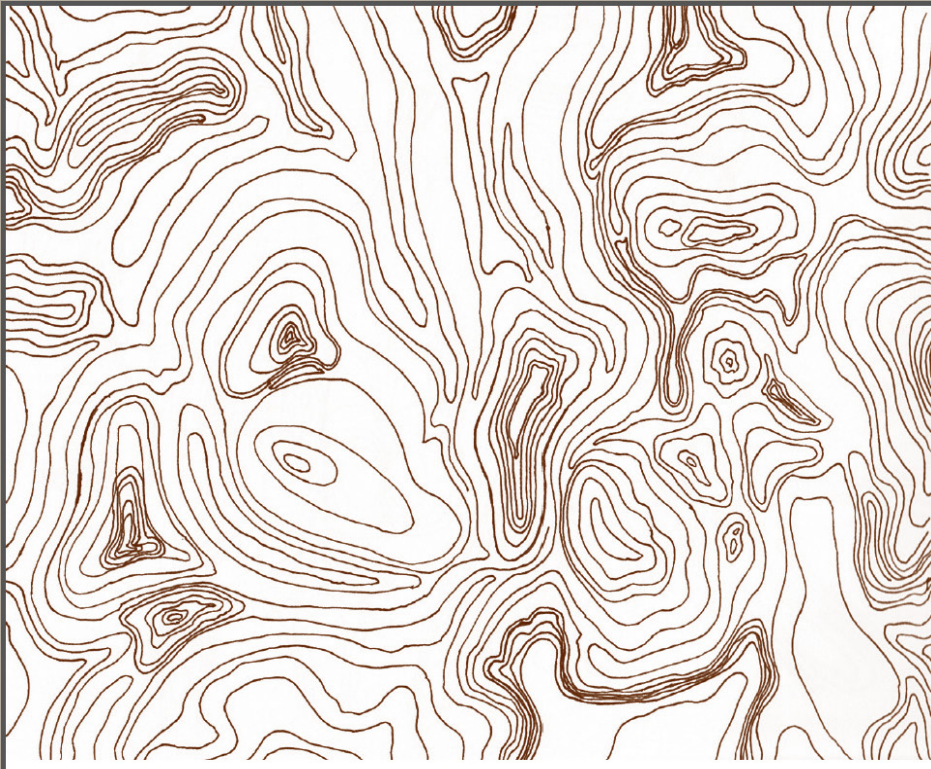
In the space below write a poem about this emotion, and what it feels like to be possessed by this emotion. The title should be the name of the emotion, and the body of the poem should not contain this word or its synonyms.

[illegible]

MORALITY

Morality is the code by which one decides how to conduct themselves, it is also the compass that sets the standards of acceptable behaviour. With access to a map of someone's morality you could guess with great accuracy how they would behave in all sorts of situations. Honesty, compassion, and justice are a few positive morals

A topographical map shows highs and lows of the surface of the earth using roundish shapes. It is a topographical map's ability to show highs and lows that makes it suitable for this exercise. In this exercise you will be creating a map of your personal morality using a topographical map to indicate the positive moral traits that you embrace (mountains, hills, etc.) and the not so positive traits that you struggle with (valleys, pits, etc.). There are several ways to differentiate a mountain from a valley in topographical maps, the simplest way is to give it a label such as "valley of lies" this method is the one that you will be using to create a readable map of your morality. You will also be coloring in your map, so you can put emphasis on hills or valleys using shading.





Narrative

OUR ENTIRE LIFE IS A STORY. A NARRATIVE THAT PLAYS OUT ON MANY STAGES, AND IN FRONT OF A VARIETY OF AUDIENCES. THE UNIQUE THING ABOUT THE STORY OF SELF, IS THAT IT CAN BE TOLD IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS, AND BY SIMPLY EMPHASIZING DIFFERENT CHARACTERS OR EVENTS THE STORY IS TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING NEW THAT WAS ALWAYS TRUE TO BEGIN WITH, BECAUSE YOU ONLY HAD TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU THOUGHT OF IT TO CHANGE IT COMPLETELY.

CHOOSE A PERSONAL POSSESSION THAT HAS ALWAYS AROUSED NEGATIVE FEELINGS INSIDE YOURSELF. FOR EXAMPLE AN EVENT FROM YOUR PAST THAT YOU FEEL PAINTED YOU AS A FAILURE, OR A PART OF YOUR BODY THAT YOU ARE NOT A FAN OF, OR A ACTUAL OBJECT THAT YOU OWN THAT YOU JUST HATE.

TELL THE STORY OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS POSSESSION THAT YOU WISH HAD HAPPENED. THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE AND YOURSELF WITHOUT THIS NEGATIVE THING THAT HAS ALWAYS BROUGHT YOU DOWN. MAKE IT UP, MAKE IT ALL UP, AND MAKE IT SOUND AS PERFECT AS YOU HAVE ALWAYS IMAGINED IT. (EXAMPLE: I NEVER FAILED CALCULUS IN COLLEGE, AND I WENT ON TO BE THE WORLD'S BEST SURGEON!)

NOW MAKE A LIST OF ALL THE POSITIVE THINGS THAT CAME INTO YOUR LIFE BECAUSE OF THIS NEGATIVE POSSESSION, AND ALL THE WAYS YOU GREW AND CHANGED BECAUSE OF IT BEING PART OF YOUR LIFE.

DO YOU STILL WISH TO CHANGE YOUR STORY? WHY? OR WHY NOT?



CHARMED

A CHARM IS A AN OBJECT KEPT OR WORN TO WARD OFF EVIL AND BRING GOOD LUCK. EACH PERSON HAS THEIR OWN VERSION OF A CHARM. SOME CHARMS HAVE A RELIGIOUS BASIS, OTHERS ARE CULTURALLY BASED, AND THEN THERE ARE THOSE UNIQUE CHARMS THAT GRADUALLY DEVELOP THEIR POWERS.

DO YOU HAVE A POSSESSION THAT WARDS OFF EVIL OR BRINGS YOU GOOD LUCK? DESCRIBE NOW.

HOW DID YOU COME INTO POSSESSION OF THIS CHARM? WHEN?

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF YOUR CHARMS POWERS? HAS IT ALWAYS BEEN A CHARM?

DESCRIBE A TIME YOU NEEDED YOUR CHARM FOR PROTECTION OR LUCK.

DRAW OR ATTACH PHOTO OF YOUR CHARM HERE



Family

The intimacy we share with our family members allows us to know them in ways that no other person ever could. Using your unique knowledge of your family members create a family tree that is representative of at least three generations of your family history. Instead of adding a photo of each family member, add an illustration (using the medium of your choice) of a possession that connects you to that person. Remember that possessions can be tangible (body parts, objects...) or intangible (moral, gods...).



Love letter

When people think of possessions, they don't often think of space or place as a possession. Unless they are speaking of nations and countries, but environments are actually very important means of extending ourselves into the world we live in. The spaces we live in and use often begin to reflect the inner processes of our own minds and our own emotional landscapes, they become a part of who we are, and because of that become a very important and meaningful possession.

In this exercise you will write a love letter to your favourite place/space in the entire world. This environment can be a space that you currently have access to or one that only exists in your memory, places such as the passenger seat of your mom's car, the studio you make art in, or the tree house that you built with your best friend when you were 10. In this love letter describe what draws you to this place, what affect being in this place has on you emotionally, and what it would mean to lose this place. Like with any proper love letter try to be as honest and open as possible, you will be amazed by what things you will want to say to this space once you actually start speaking to it.





Replication

Replication is a process of recreation that maintains the important aspects of the objects form (for example the stylistic details that make a Moroccan teapot different than an Arabian teapot). In this exercises you are asked to recreate an possession that functions as a tool but also represents you (your favorite camera brand?) using the clay provided in your kit. remember it is crucial to retain the stylistic attributes of the object.

Is you recreate the possession consider which aspects of this possession make it unique in style, shape, and representation:

How could you reduce the shape of this object to its simplest shape or form (abstract it) and yet still keep it recognizable?

Row this object different than other similar type objects?



Beauty

SURELY EVERYONE KNOWS BY NOW THAT BEAUTY IS IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER. IT IS THIS FACT, THAT BEAUTY IS SUBJECTIVE, THAT MAKES IT A UNIQUE WINDOW INTO A PERSONS PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD. BY EXAMINING OUR SUBJECTIVE EYE WE CAN GAIN INSIGHT INTO OUR PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD AND PERSONAL VOICE.

WHAT IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL POSSESSION THAT YOU OWN (MUST BE TANGIBLE)?

LOOKING AT IT, CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT MAKES IT SO BEAUTIFUL? IS THERE SOMETHING ABOUT THE LINES OF ITS SHAPES OR ITS COLOR THAT SPEAKS TO YOUR OWN PERSONAL VOICE?

NOW CLOSE YOUR EYES, PLACE YOUR HANDS ON ITS SURFACE. AND AGAIN DESCRIBE WHAT MAKES IT BEAUTIFUL? WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE IN YOUR HANDS? IS THERE SOMETHING ABOUT ITS WEIGHT THAT APPEALS TO YOU? DOES IT HAVE A TEXTURE?

RAISE IT UP TO YOUR NOSE, SMELL IT. WHAT DOES IT SMELL LIKE? DESCRIBE ITS SMELL IN TERMS OF WEIGHT TEXTURE.

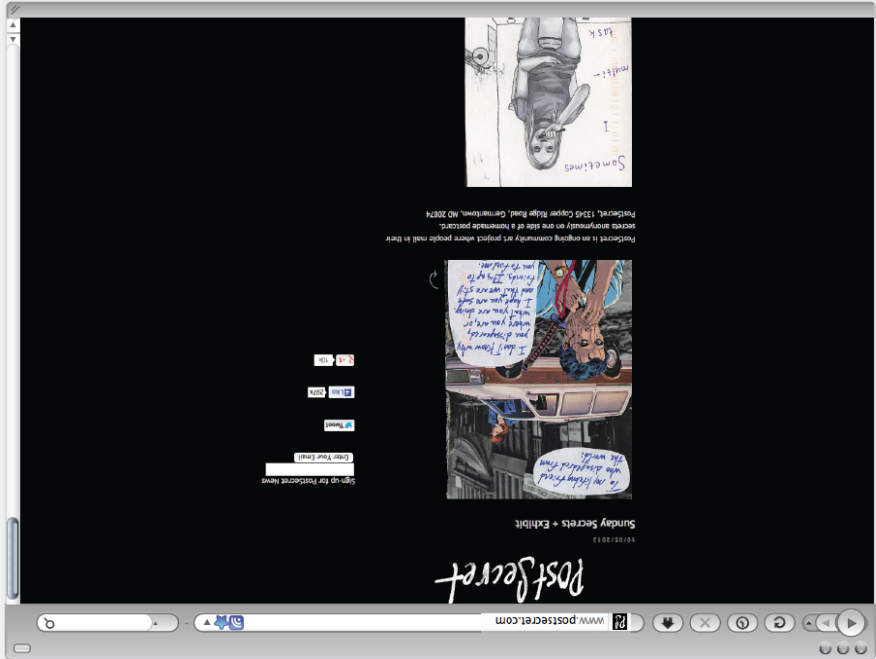


HAST THOU INHALED-O READER, SAY!
WITH ZEST AND LAZY GREED, THE OLD
INCENSE THAT CHAPEL ARCHES HOLD
OR THE STALE MUSK OF A SACHET

O MAGIC SPELL, O ECSTASY!
-TO MAKE THE PRESENT YIELD THE PAST!-

A PHANTOM - BY CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

SMELL IS THE SENSE MOST CLOSELY CONNECTED TO MEMORY. IT IS SO POWERFUL AND LONG
LASTING THAT A LOVE ONES SCENT CAN OFTEN TRIGGER BITTERSWEET MEMORIES DECADES
AFTER THE LOVE ONE IS NO LONGER ACCESSIBLE. THINK OF YOUR PRESENT SELF AS
SOMEONE SEPARATE FROM YOUR FUTURE SELF. NOW ATTEMPT TO DOCUMENT YOUR PERSONAL
SCENT ETERNALLY BY SNEAKING, SNIFFING, AND ROBBING THE COMBINATION OF ALL THE
SMELLS YOU USE AT THIS POINT IN YOUR LIFE ONTO THIS PAGE.



Confess

ON JANUARY 1ST 2005 ARTIST TRACY WARDEN STARTED THE POSTSECRET COMMUNITY ART PROJECT. THE PROJECT ASKS STRANGERS TO SEND IN
SECRETS THEY HAVE NEVER SHARED WITH ANYONE BEFORE. A SELECTION OF THESE SECRETS ARE THEN RANDOMLY AGREE TO BE POSTED ON A BLOG THAT
WARDEN CURATES. SINCE ITS CREATION A LARGE VARIETY OF THE SECRETS SHARED ARE ACTUALLY CONFESSIONS. SOME ARE SERIOUS, MOST ARE NOT.
FOR THIS EXERCISE YOU WILL CREATE YOUR OWN SECRET CONFESSION POSTCARD USING THE POSTCARD PROVIDED. THINK OF A TIME THAT YOU
BORROWED, TOOK, OR STOLE A POSSESSION FROM SOMEONE.

YOUR POSTCARD NEEDS TO CONTAIN TWO THINGS:

1. A CONFESSION OF YOUR MOTIVATION FOR TAKING SOMETHING THAT DIDN'T BELONG TO YOU. WHY DID YOU HAVE TO HAVE IT?
2. AN ILLUSTRATION OF SOME SORT THAT INDICATES THE THING THAT YOU TOOK POSSESSION OF. THIS COULD BE A DRAWING, A PHOTOGRAPH,
ATTACHING THE OBJECT ITSELF, JUST ANY MEANS OF SHOWING WHAT IT WAS YOU TOOK.

PASTE YOUR COMPLETED POSTCARD HERE

YOUR BELIEFS BECOME YOUR THOUGHTS,
YOUR THOUGHTS BECOME YOUR WORDS,
YOUR WORDS BECOME YOUR ACTIONS,
YOUR ACTIONS BECOME YOUR HABITS,
YOUR HABITS BECOME YOUR VALUES,
YOUR VALUES BECOME YOUR DESTINY.

MAHATMA GANDHI

A MANTRA IS A SLOGAN THAT YOU REPEAT TO YOURSELF ON A
REGULAR BASIS. THE IDEA IS TO CREATE A MANTRA THAT WILL
LEAD TO THE DESTINY YOU WISH TO POSSESS. IN THIS EXERCISE
YOU NEED TO CONSIDER WHAT VALUES YOU'D LIKE TO BRING
INTO YOUR LIFE. YOUR MANTRA SHOULD BE NO LONGER THAN
TWO SENTENCES. ON THE FACING PAGE REPEAT YOUR MANTRA
OVER AND OVER UNTIL YOU'VE FILLED THE ENTIRE PAGE.

START HERE

END HERE



We all have at least one possessions, tangible (objects, people, ect.) or intangible (dreams, morals, ect.), that we choose not to share with others around us. The reasons we choose to keep these possessions private says a great deal about our personal values and experience. For example some choose to keep something private because these possessions reflect personal values that differ from those around them, and they have experienced being judged, or rejected by others because of these personal values.

On a sheet of paper describe a possession that you choose to keep private. Explain this choice. Then place the paper into the envelope attached here. Seal it if you want to continue to keep it private, or leave it open if you are ready to share your possession.

PRIVATE

